Composing technology: A critical rhetorical analysis of doxa on the Writing Program Administrators LISTSERV

by

Christopher D. M. Andrews, M.A.

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Approved

Fred Kemp
Co-Chair of Committee

Rich Rice
Co-Chair of Committee

Rebecca Rickly

Dominick Casadonte
Interim Dean of the Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

Digital writing technologies are a reality for composition and rhetoric, rather than a theoretical exercise or problem for the future. Despite a social and institutional context that includes rapidly changing tools, texts, and genres, the discipline of composition and rhetoric has continued to treat technology conservatively in its mainstream scholarly discourses. After reviewing literature in composition and rhetoric and computers and composition, in this study I interrogate the ideological status of technology in the discipline of composition and rhetoric at the level of its informal, ephemeral textual material. I rely on *doxa*, or the commonplace ideological warrant, in order to describe and examine disciplinary assumptions about technology. To explore this, I conducted a critical rhetorical analysis, purposively sampling technology-related messages on the Writing Program Administrators' LISTSERV (WPA-L).

Finding 26 specific technology-specific *doxa* distributed among sampled threads, this study focuses on four clusters of ideas: participants' belief that technology is extraneous to the work and theoretical program of composition and rhetoric; participants' understandings of the relative newness or importance of digital writing technologies, participants' discursive empowerment of technologies , and participants' reliance on instrumentalist conceptions of digital technologies, describing them primarily in terms of augmentation. Findings from this research illustrate that WPA-L discourse about technology is motivated by an

instrumentalist conception of writing, deterministic philosophies of technology, and is often distracted from critical engagement with technology by its emphasis on student and instructor agency.

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW OF THIS DISSERTATION

> Technological change, then, is forcing disciplined literary study to look outward to the changing literacy in the world around us. (Lanham, 1995, p. 17)

Rationale: The electronic composition

In the early- and mid-1990s, it seemed to some scholars that the personal computer was about to send quickening shudders through the academy, jarring rhetoric, composition, technical and professional communication, and even literary study into a vividly hypertextual world of rapid and incessant change. The "well-formed text" was suddenly something that was evolving again, and that evolution needed to be appraised, anticipated, and even embraced (Bernhardt, 1993, p. 410). George P. Landow (1997), for example, described multisequential writing as "a revolution in human thought," a "paradigm shift" for conceptual systems, and nearly always "fundamentally" opposed to and revising traditional print hierarchies and theories of text (p. 2). And though nascent hypertext prophets like Richard Lanham (1995) or Jay David Bolter (2001) may have been overzealous in describing how the textual disciplines would be transformed or bowled over by a flash of words on the screen, and though the transformations that would take place were often quite different from the kenning of those early star-gazers, it is hard to imagine writing today without the swirl and glow of screens.

"Technology," a term that can be sometimes unhelpful in its breadth of possible referents, is a long-embedded part of what we in composition and rhetoric do, and has been since long before the screen ever began to change our disciplinary work (Baron, 2009). As part of our materiality, it is now an aspect of our worldview and our praxis of composing whether we think of it that way or not. That issue: *whether we think of it that way or not*, is what I am most interested in in this study—what are the implications of our thinking (or not thinking) about technology in composition?

Theorists both inside and beyond composition and rhetoric, such as Richard Lanham, Christina Haas, Cynthia Selfe, James Porter, and Jeff Rice, have long been arguing for the importance of attending to medium and message, or to the changes digital communication has brought to our understanding of writing and rhetoric. As these and other scholars have argued, however, because the discipline has historically been tied to a particular set of material writing practices—that is, particular and long-seated ways of thinking about and doing writing—composition has historically failed to explicitly treat or carefully think through media or technology issues in its understanding of the field.

One could argue that a scan of recent publications in the field will show this situation to be changed—*CCC* 64.1 (September 2012), for example, included articles on eye tracking and data mining; Computers and Composition Digital Press continues to grow with texts like *The New Work of Composing* (2012) and *Collaborative Approaches to the Digital in English Studies* (2011), and the

relatively new media literacy and digital technology tools sections of the *Research in Teaching English* annotated bibliography have enjoyed increasingly large numbers of entries since 2010. The WAC Clearinghouse has engaged in over 15 years of open-access publishing, including titles and series informed by digital rhetoric and new media studies, and recently announced the *#writing* series, treating these issues in interactive as well as bound titles. The situation *is* changing. However, an important question remains: *Changing into what?* Are technology and digital writing things that we pay adequate and meaningful attention to? Or, as James Porter (2007) has claimed in his foreword to *Digital Writing Research*, is technology simply shunted off into sub-specializations within composition—or even outside of it into digital humanities—and as a result ignored as a substantial concern for composition and rhetoric's theory and practice?

I've become long used to the confused looks I receive from colleagues both in and out of my small liberal arts university English department when I describe my dissertation research. *Technology? Shouldn't you be doing sentence style or Steinbeck or semiotics or something?* At the same institution, however, I participate in the daily habituation of students to their computers and the array of texts and devices they are expected to be connected to as young academics, as members of a democracy, and as enthusiastic consumers and producers of culture. I participate in our campus' ubiquitous computing initiatives as a user and, because I teach so many students who rely on it, also participate in the

institutional program review that comes with such initiatives. I write with and teach writing for an array of devices, media, delivery choices, and software iterations—and the complex network of actors, audiences, scenes, contexts, and purposes connected to them. Technology is part of my and thousands of others' daily bread.

Is the situation of composition and technology changing? Of course. Are technology and digital writing things that we pay adequate and meaningful attention to? That answer is less clear. Technology has become increasingly connected to the innovation and future success not only of the discipline but also of the university. One could almost randomly choose a recent post from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*'s blog, *Wired Campus*, and see evidence of this rhetoric. Computers and mobile devices are the norm; the academic landscape is covered (or littered, depending upon whom you ask) with technology. But we are still figuring out what to *do* with our tools. Composition's philosophy of technology matters to its own future relevance and institutional place. Unfortunately, the "position of orthodoxy" (Dobrin, 2011a, p. 21) for much of composition's history has elided "the significance of the role of (information) technologies" other than to accept than as basic tools for circulating writing and information (p. 72).

Despite this claim, composition and rhetoric is in many ways a deeply technological discipline, and many leading scholars point toward digital writing as the lifeblood of writing in the academy and beyond—Kathleen Yancey's 2004

CCCC chair's address is a good example of this, in which she pointed toward a "new set of practices" for the discipline in the 21st century (p. 308). However, in many ways composition and rhetoric still seems to have conflicted understanding of technology and digital writing practice. Today, after ten- and twenty-year-old calls to "pay attention" to technology such as Cynthia L. Selfe's central *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century* (1999) are arguments that point out that composition continues to fail to do so, such as Porter's (2007) foreword or Sidney I. Dobrin's "Ecology and Concepts of Technology" (2011b)..

Background: Composition's orthodoxy

Composition has formed and validated itself as a discipline through historical and taxonomic studies since the 1960s. Disciplinary self-analysis is a significant epistemological tendency in composition research—especially a fascination with professionalization and ideology. Many of the discipline-forming research studies from the middle of the twentieth century do so by writing the historical connection between classical and contemporary rhetoric or by constructing a narrative of pedagogical decline; The oft-cited work of Corbett Connors, Crowley, Horner, Kinneavy, and Kitzhaber are examples of this tendency, as is newer scholarship, like Ede's *Situating Composition* (2004). For composition researchers and teachers in the rhetoricizing 1960s and even more so in the taxonomizing 1970s and 1980s, the making of a contemporary composition pedagogy was often done through writing disciplinary history or

constructing axiological classifications of composition pedagogies (Berlin, 1988/2009; Fulkerson 1979/2009, 2005). Composition has been characterized by a spirit of "increasing self-reflection" (Hawisher et al, 1996, p. 125) that came with the growth in professionalism of the 1980s, while Connors has called the 1990s the "era of disciplinarity" (1999, p. 4). (Only time and history-centered scholarship will reveal how the discipline of the 2000s might be characterized.)

In acting out this disciplinary self-analysis, composition and rhetoric has tended to define itself against a politicized orthodoxy, a rogues' gallery including formalism and current-traditional pedagogy, the politics of English literature departments and the academy, positivistic approaches to the composing process and cognition, and even the universal writing requirement. This constant definition of the ills of the current paradigm is how the field has moved forward. In its attention to itself, composition has tended to construct centers of power in order to define the field; Byron Hawk described this tendency in *A Counter-History of Composition*, showing how early leaders in composition used classical rhetoric "in the service of polemics" against not current-traditional rhetoric, romanticism, and vitalism (2007, p. 16). Cartographies for understanding the field, like Richard J. Fulkerson's 1979 axiological analysis, have been turned into models through Ph.D. programs, textbooks, and conferences, and have also become dichotomies used for politicizing the discipline of composition and rhetoric (as Berlin and others have done) (2007, p. 87).

In the last decade, a series of scholars have claimed that composition and rhetoric is floundering and center-less. Fulkerson has argued that composition is "a less unified field than it was a decade ago" (2005, p. 680), citing widening variation in the axiologies, pedagogies, and theories behind its coursework and scholarship. Between cultural studies, expressivism, current-traditional rhetoric, and procedural rhetoric, there is genuine controversy over the very goals of teaching writing classes in college. Composition and rhetoric, despite the agenda-setting of NCTE and CCC, seems to lack a real sense of what "good writing" might be or how it might best be taught (Fulkerson, 2005). Russell Durst, after reviewing the major outcomes of 20 years of composition scholarship (1984-2003), argued that composition is "in something of a rut" because there is no "powerful orthodoxy within composition studies to work against, such as current-traditional teaching or the cognitive emphasis" (2009, p. 1677). In *The End of Composition*, David Smit has argued that composition's profoundest accomplishments, "professionalization of the field and the promotion of the writing process" (2007, p. 6), are now being called into question, and that we have no new knowledge left to make and no central method to use in making it. As Smit has claimed:

> for all practical purposes, the major concepts, paradigms, and models we have to work with in dealing with these issues are already known and widely accepted, [such that] there is little hope we can reconceptualize writing in startling new ways. (p. 3)

Indeed, he added, "we do not even know how to think about the nature of writing differently than we do now" (p. 3), and rather spend much of our time incessantly remapping and "reconfiguring" the field (p. 7). Smit's assessment is likely accurate, as a scan of recent article titles in *College Composition and Communication* shows a flagship interest in labor issues, writing majors, responsibility, and disciplinarity in as much frequency as assessment, clarity, and professional, institutional, or classroom writing practice.

The result of this disciplinary centerlessness is a pedagogical and theoretical stasis much like the one Geoffery Sirc has written of:

> The cause of our current stasis? Doubtless the major influence has been composition's professionalization, its self-tormented quest for disciplinary stature. The price we have paid for our increased credibility as an academic field has been a narrowing of the bandwidth of what used to pass for composition. (Rice & O'Gorman, 2008, p. 284)

What Sirc recognized is that the new orthodoxy is not a scholarly movement or pedagogical agenda, but rather a narrow and traditional view of composition as an abstract set of humanistic values and intellectual processes developed in and evidenced by essayistic literacy. As he argued in *English Composition as a Happening* (2002), composition-rhetoric[1] is stuck in a rut, mired in a particular way of thinking about writers and writing. Despite "increasingly different compositional means: new tools for the mechanical reproduction of texts and an

[1] Sirc used the term "Modernist Composition" (p. 36)

on-going electronic salon in which to circulate them" (p. 36), he noted in 2002 that the discipline had continued to "define its ends in terms of narrowly-defined means" (p. 36). Sirc's interest in an avant-garde model for composition and rhetoric was both hyperbolic and prophetic in its optimism for multimodal and experimental composition, but his description of composition as deeply—perhaps dangerously—conservative in its approach to technology is an important progenitor of Dobrin (2011a), Porter (2009), and other researchers' concerns. The cause of our disciplinary stasis—or at least the stasis as perceived by scholars such as Smit—is a version of composition that doesn't theorize about writing in relationship to how it is created in various media or with particular technologies. The technology question is precisely the sort of thing the analyses of Durst, Smit, and others have overlooked as they created their visions of the discipline.

Porter has made such a case in his foreword to *Digital Writing Research*, describing a headless professionalized composition that "no longer focuses predominantly on studying composition practices, ironically" (2007, p. xii) and above all ignores digital writing as a significant part of the discipline's narrative and research agenda. Jeff Rice, in *The Rhetoric of Cool*, has also pointed out the special irony that the "rhetorics of digital culture" and invention that composition has not been paying attention to have been "circulating and discussed" since the time of composition's 1963 "rebirth" (2007, p. 14). The now-standardized Northian grand narrative of composition-sans-technology is not simply an

accident, but ideological, restricting the field's image in order to keep tradition in place and shut out new elements. Rather than opening to new media, processes, and relationships—ultimately, new theory and practice—composition and rhetoric participates in what Dobrin has called "heterotopic conversations" (2011a, p. 54).

Working from Foucault, Dobrin described the heterotopic space as one that is penetrable, but closed; it is not freely accessible. Entry is either "compulsory" or allowable after individuals have completed a "rite of purification" that shows the new member's ideological commitment (i.e. the composition-rhetoric Ph.D.) (2011a, p. 53). The deeply conservative (Gunner, 2002, p. 12), hegemonic discipline of composition is not only inattentive to theory about writing, Dobrin argued, but overly focused on management (i.e. WPA studies) and student subjectivity. Composition fundamentally understands writing to be a function of (student) agency (Dobrin, 2011s, p. 78) rather than something integrated in complex technological systems and "not readily identifiable or analyzable beyond those systems" (p. 87). For Dobrin, Smit's failure—and composition's orthodoxic failure writ large—was his attention to the student-subject agenda and commitment to the sense that composition is about the classroom, rather than a field that engages in research about writing. The "locus" of this resistance and impetus is, according to Dobrin, the WPA agenda that so colors graduate work in composition and "drives disciplinary *doxa*" (2011a, p. 95). I agree with Dobrin—and this is part of the rationale behind

my rhetorical analysis corpus—that the WPA ideology powerfully influences the rest of the field's reception of theory (p. 109).

In his *WPA* piece, "Ecology and Concepts of Technology" (2011b), Dobrin has argued that despite the "inextricable bond" between writing and technology, composition's technological research has been "hamstrung" by two lines of inquiry: the debate about whether or not digital technologies are beneficial or detrimental, and discussions about how writers and teachers might use technology to improve writing and its teaching (pp. 175-176). Such positions, according to Dobrin, only understand technology as external, an apparatus rather than something indistinguishable from the writing.

Though research into composition and digital writing studies *has* been an increasing trend in composition, that trend mostly occurs beyond the "center" of the discipline: primarily the pages of *CCC,* but also other research spaces like *College English*. Digital writing research continues to be relegated to subfield status, and many broad, argumentative assessments of composition and rhetoric—like the "state of composition" commentary of writers like Durst and Smit—fail to adequately examine technology as an increasing influence on composition research and pedagogy and a new theoretical and practical site of scholarly work. Durst only briefly spoke to technology rhetoric, new media, and computers and composition in his overview of the field; his essay mostly reified the orthodoxy of medium, the orthodoxy of our assumptions about what our students know about writing with technology as a vague "contextual factor

affecting postsecondary writing" (2009, p. 1671). Similarly, Smit didn't write about technology as a major facet of what we know (or don't know) about composition as a discipline. Fulkerson, in "Composition at the Turn of the Twenty First Century" (2005), merely footnoted technology (via computers and composition) as perhaps an issue in composition, but certainly not a major approach or part of how we conceptualize and do writing. Salvo (2006) made a similar case about cultural studies' tendency to ignore or otherwise fail to account for technology—an important example for him is Berlin's map of the discipline, which makes no mention of it, as seems to have been standard practice for the time.

It would be fallacious to claim that this point hasn't been made in composition before. Since the 1980s, there has been no shortage of arguments about the need for composition and rhetoric, along with other rhetorical, productive disciplines, to look more carefully *at* technology. Christina Haas, Gail Hawisher, Cynthia Selfe, nearly every author in Heidi A McKee and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss' *Digital Writing Research,* and many others have reiterated some version of the call to pay attention, to look At as well as Through technology alongside our study and teaching of composition, writing, and discourse. It would also be ridiculous to suggest that *all* composition research must have the word "digital," "computer" "mobile" or "technology" in the abstract. However, this caveat does not let composition and rhetoric off the hook for tending to overlook technology. I would propose that part of this resistance seems to be ideological in

nature, whether it tends to be out of a romantic humanism that disdains instrumentalism (Reid, 2007; Hawk, 2007; Bolter, 2001), out of a critique of capitalism or entrepreneurialism (Carter, 2005; Kemp, 2005a) or even out of an anti-technological-determinist stance (Johnson, 1998).

Construct: Ideology and change

> While one may intone a phrase like "ideological view" with a solemn and mysterious look, it represents little more than robust common sense—skepticism not as a way of life, but as a leavening making its way among high sounding ideas, innocence, and hype. No credo, however lyrical, authentically expressed, or truly believed, should escape cross-examination. (Wander, 1980, p. 78)

Ideology—generally understood in rhetoric and writing fields as the articulated and unarticulated belief systems that create and are created by discourse—is a potent force. Greg Myers has defined ideology as thought and belief that "structure[s] our thinking so deeply that we take [it] for granted" (2003, p. 439). In "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," James Berlin noted that ideology is a term of "great instability" that addresses three fundamental issues: what exists, what is good, and what is possible. A culture's epistemology, ethics, and expectations about reality are socially endorsed in its language practices, history, and material conditions, seeming "necessary, normal, and inevitable" (2009, pp. 668–669) and contributing to conceptions of how power is distributed in a society. Ideology sets agendas, delimits what is commonplace, and bounds groups against that which seems outlandish. From the perspective of critical studies, the most dangerous of ideological systems is the naturalized

one—where ideology seems so self-evident that those who participate in the belief system can't even recognize that it's something to be critiqued. As critical theory and rhetorical scholars would agree, ideology is both produced by and produces discourse, though the specific methods of production or tactics for deployment vary between different groups.

An analytical concept that has more often been used in poetics, but that has also seen some important—if infrequent—use in rhetorical analysis and criticism is *doxastic discourse*—a text that activates what readers know by relying on shared opinions and beliefs in order to both "ensure their readability while exerting an influence on the reader" (Amossy, 2002, p. 466). *Doxa*, according to Amossy, are those common-sense ideas and ways of thinking that just seem reasonable, either from a universal Aristotelian perspective like the *koinoi topoi* or from the more contextual and socially-seated perspectives of much contemporary criticism. *Doxa* are both cultural ways of reasoning and stereotypes, clichés, and commonplaces; they are ideas that process reality in such seamless ways that alternative ways of looking are unthinkable: we become so convinced that the world can work in no other way because the simple statement "that's the way it works" (or it's how it "should work" or how "they say" it works) is enough to make things make sense. Working from Amossy, Jay Gordon calls *doxa* the "constellation of the values-grounding beliefs we take for granted or about which we may not even be aware" (2009, p. 115). The standard critique of naturalization is that when a point of view becomes invisible, those

who hold it may not recognize the need for change, even going so far as to resist it. This visibility logic applies to *doxa* as well; the *doxa*-as-accepted-idea is tricky not simply because it is invisible (it may, in fact, be quite explicit, as is often the case in this study), but rather, because the statement is so shared or even cliché that it "just seems to make sense."

When naturalized or self-evident beliefs combine, these links can become especially potent. Selfe's research program has for some time been examining rhetorics of technology in our classrooms. *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century, h*er 1999 critique of the links between technology, literacy, social process and economic success in America, is an important example. She described a series of ideological narratives that influenced the "Technology Literacy Challenge." The first, **Science + Technology = Progress**, makes a common and powerful modernist connection between scientific advancement and improved quality of life. This equation is magnified in what she described as a particularly American equation: **Technology + Democracy (+ Capitalism) = Progress**. Technological literacy and the superiority of the free market in a democratic system ensure not only American exceptionalism and prosperity, but the progressive good of democracy and the free market can be spread all the faster using technology. A third equation she described is **Technology + Education = Progress**, which combines American narratives of public and higher education not only as preparation for life in democratic (capitalist) society, but also as part of the competitive advancement of the nation. Educational systems

informed by technological advances can be more successful. Selfe's concern was not necessarily with the *correctness* or *incorrectness* of the equations, but with the ways they combine to constitute a national project for technological literacy in some undebatable ways. That is, to think that progress could be had in a way other than those narratives is not simply "outlandish" but slips dangerously close to being un-American (1999, p. 123). Such a combination stands, Selfe pointed out, as an invisible brick wall in front of teachers who wish to address inequities or teach a critical perspective on technology. Their commitment to questioning is bowled over or blocked by the ideology-bolstered rhetorics of the government, industry, and parents committed to those tacit equations.

Researcher-critics examine ideology and the texts that "summon and propagate the social orders in which we live" (Stillar, 1998, p. 1) because to do so is to confront, analyze, and productively deal with interactions of power in our daily lives. Whether the object of study is called dogma, an "attitude," or an ideology, the researcher-critic pursues that understanding of how ideas are transmitted because "our representations of the world are transformative and have lived consequences" (Turnley, 2011, p. 128). Cultural and critical studies attempt to get at good reasons and meaningful action in the face of vested interests. Ideological research programs need not always be purely agonistic or combative in nature; however, if members of a group have identified a need for change or a variance in ideologies claimed and ideologies lived, then the mentalities and discursive realities standing in their way need to be identified,

listened to, and rhetorically challenged. Such an activity applies to the context of academic institutions as much as to sociopolitical ones.

In this study, I examine the ideology of technology in composition-rhetoric because parts of what we call "the discipline" of composition—in its practice and in its theory—seems to be stuck in a rut about written representation (Dobrin, 2011a; Porter, 2007; Rice, 2007; Salvo, 2006; Smit, 2007). Composition is mired in a dogmatic way of thinking about composing that sees technology (call it "computers and writing," call it "digital writing") as simply the means by which writers make writing. Composition scholars like those cited above have argued that the discipline has failed to adequately respond to the changes that digital technology has introduced to the ways writers write and students learn; it has failed to do so in a context of undeniable social-technological change. In the published version of her 2004 Chair's address, Yancey claimed that the mismatch between our theory, our classroom expectations, and our own compositional practices "suggest that we have already committed to a theory of communication that is both/and: print and digital" (2004, p. 307). But as Yancey noted, composition ignores key 21st century changes.

Though almost ten years old at the time of this writing, I believe that claim still stands. *Computers and Composition* as well as *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, and other digitally-aware journals take technology as one of the central "parameters governing composing" (Yancey, 2004, p. 320), while primary journals in the field don't seem to deal with it in meaningful and

consistent ways. It is "partitioned off" (p. 320) and treated as a subdiscipline. What is it that motivates this treatment? What is the doxastic knowledge, the ideology, the value system or way of thinking (about writing, thinking, learning, students, technology, or even about reality) in composition that resists this change? That, most of all, is the broad question that motivates this dissertation.

In his foreword to *Digital Writing Research* (2007), Porter described computers and composition as a continuing outsider or incidental special interest to researchers in both computer-mediated communication and in composition. Porter argued that composition, especially, has continued to fail to investigate computers or technology in meaningful or systematic ways. Citing Raúl Sánchez (2005), Porter noted the irony that composition doesn't study writing practice itself, ignoring production for theory and special issues such as labor, and ignoring technology as something that isn't a "substantive factor affecting rhetorical dynamics or composing practices" (2007, p. xii); an assessment reiterated in Dobrin's *Postcomposition* (2011a). Computers and composition, Porter argued, fills that gap by showing how studying technology is integral to studying writing. Such a relationship has implications for how researchers theorize writing as well as how they approach methodology (the major concern *of Digital Writing Research* as a whole). His claim is bold, that:

> Rhetoric/Composition has yet to acknowledge, truly acknowledge, that changes and developments in writing tools have changed writing, literacy, and communication practices in fundamental ways—that, given how writing happens in the 21st century, *all* composition research needs to be computers and writing research. (Porter, 2007, p. xii)

No readers of composition journals could claim that "all" composition research is computers and writing research—and not many would agree with the claim that it should be. Still, Porter's is but one voice calling for renewed attention to how digital writing and computers has impacted (or should impact) our understanding of composition practice and theory.

Research: Questions and methodologies

The call to attend is an important one in composition. In *Writing Technology*, Christina Haas (1997) argued that:

> If literacy scholars are to pursue the Technology Question, make decisions about pedagogical uses of technology, and take an active role in technological development, it is essential that we examine the underlying theories of technology that are a powerful (if unarticulated) force shaping attitudes and actions toward technology. (1997, p. 167)

And this question has been updated, reiterated, and geared specifically toward researchers in 2007 by Kimme Hea's chapter in *Digital Writing Research*; she asked composition researchers to:

> challenge inequitable constructions and representations of technology to create more equitable electronic spaces and relationships—a position that can be instantiated through a critical, situated methodology for research through and on technology. (2007, p. 273)

In both cases, implicit theories or constructions are powerful forces that help shape the attention and trajectory of disciplinary work. The work of composition includes not only understanding how new media or digital texts and technologies work and are constructed, employing those texts pedagogically and professionally, and creating new methodologies for doing so; it also includes

understanding, challenging, and remaking constructions of technology, even within our own field.

As mentioned above, scholars in rhetoric and composition have been arguing that there seems to be a widening gap between the kind of writing composition theorists have traditionally dealt with and the new kinds of writing that are quickly overtaking contemporary culture: often appearing under the term "digital writing." With the publication of texts such as *Digital Writing Research* (2007) and *Because Digital Writing Matters* (2010), the notion of "digital writing" has become part of the terminology of composition and an important manifestation of the discourse of technology in the discipline. In this study, I don't examine what digital writing is or does, or even how "The Field of Rhetoric and Composition" sees itself in terms of this social-technological shift. Such a research goal would invite nothing but overgeneralization; instead, I describe ideologies or attitudes toward technology as deployed in specific locations in the field—in particular, the administration and teaching-focused WPA agenda as reflected by discourse on the WPA-L.

Working from Porter's (2007) and Dobrin's (2011b) critiques and taking as an underlying felt sense that composition has continued to rely upon outdated theories of composing, this dissertation interrogates the status of technology in the discipline with the following set of research questions:

1. What philosophies or common notions of technology, specifically digital writing, do participants in the discourse of composition and rhetoric share, as evidenced by the WPA-L community?

2. What *doxa* do WPA-L discussion participants rely on when they make arguments about digital writing?

3. What underlying theories of technology shape WPA-L participants' views of digital writing?

Answers to these questions may form the basis of critique and point toward recommendations and further theory, but they are first of all intended to result in description. I elaborate further on these questions, their development, and methods for developing answers to them in the following sections.

1. What philosophies or common notions of technology, specifically digital writing, do participants in the discourse of composition and rhetoric share?

This project began with a problem that I saw emerging from my growing knowledge of composition literature: the still-conflicted understanding that composition seems to have of technology and digital writing practice, even as it moves fully into the 21st century. As described above, alongside ten- and twenty-year-old calls to "pay attention" to technology are research agendas that point out that composition studies continues to fail to do so; this project emerged from that cognitive dissonance. Thus, a generic question for research presented itself: what philosophies of technology cause conflict in composition studies? How are they manifested in the discipline? An ideological study seemed to be a good way to proceed, and there are numerous of ways to study such a problem. That question

signifies a broad point of curiosity, a career of scholarship rather than a researchable question with a particular site of inquiry; still, it offered a significant beginning for a dissertation topic

When researchers begin with questions rather than sites, how do they find what will help them to develop answers? As Charles Bazerman noted in "Theories of the Middle Range," researchers should not overlook serendipity in finding research sites as they begin thinking about their originating questions, the fundamental questions that form "basic curiosities and motivations for inquiry" (2008, p. 302). Serendipity—somewhere between convenience, purpose, and accident—is research that happens as a result of one coming across "exactly what you need to shed light on some issue you have been thinking of about" (p. 305). Thus, an online debate about student agency and computer use on the WPA-L, which I would not only read as a participant in the mailing list performing the mundane daily activity of the composition scholar/teacher, but would also first use as a text for a smaller rhetorical analysis project, has acted as a spring board for this dissertation and guided my thinking as I designed my research questions and developed methods of critical rhetorical analysis in order to study a much larger number of texts from the WPA-L. Another element of this process is what Thomas Huckin (1992) called "hunch": the initial selection of a corpus for textual analysis is often very much a matter of the researcher's informal notion that there is something there of interest. Reading these kinds of threads, I had a hunch that I might find something interesting there.

The WPA LISTSERV, because it is read and written by a wide group of professionals in composition, including teachers, administrators, researchers, faculty emeritus, and graduate students in its reader- and writer-ship, provides an opportunity to see motives and interests of the discipline through a different window than scholarly publications. This relationship is not generalizable from a statistically representative sense—one does not see "Composition Studies" or "Composition and Rhetoric" when one reads the WPA-L any more than one sees "all sophomore writers" when reading papers in a 2000-level advanced composition course. However, the users of this mailing list can help us think about composition and rhetoric from a broader critical sense. If we accept that texts do not simply share, report on, or promulgate ideology, but that they make it manifest, displaying "the whole host of social systems and structures with their attendant resources "speaking through social agents" (Stillar, 1998, p. 6), then we can accept that a small group of members of a discipline will hold at least some of the larger disciplinary norms as part of their habitus. A disciplinary e-mail list, where participants are engaged in thinking through, sharing, and debating ideas focused specifically on composition, is a site where disciplinary values, attitudes, and commonplaces are incorporated.

Rhetorical and content analysis are appropriate methods for systematically examining, formulating a description of, and critiquing this kind of disciplinary thinking. Rhetorical analysis is an important approach to textual research for researchers interested in how ideology is manifest in texts, an

approach that, when designed thoughtfully and rhetorically, helps researchers make data-based inferences about groups (MacNealy, 1999, p. 124). In his rationale for taking stock of credos in rhetorical criticism, Wander states that ideological critique in an academic context ought to "bore in" and "confront ideals professed with what they obscure in either theory or practice" (1980, p. 78). The goal of ideological rhetorical critique is to assess *that which is* and divorce it from assumptions that *that which is, is given*. As well, the choice of rhetorical analysis also speaks to a tradition of investigation taken by scholars such as Selfe (1999) in *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century*, who examined the rhetorics that complicate literacy education's representation of technology, and Haas (1996) in *Writing Technology*, who studied the logical and ideological warrants used by English studies scholars writing about technology. This dissertation, in particular, takes up Haas' trajectory, using rhetorical analysis to render the hidden tacit in the "know thyself" spirit of Selfe's study.

Haas' *Writing Technology* (1996) was an attempt to historicize writing and technology (specifically computers) in the age of the computer "revolution." Her main task was a thorough and multifaceted systematic examination of the "technology question" (essentially, "What does it mean for language to become material?"). Such a study, she argued, could help "adjudicate conflicting claims about computer technologies for writing," and is "vital to understanding the nature of computer technologies for literacy, their power in shaping literate acts, and people's relationship to them" (1996, p. 5). In her rhetorical analysis chapter,

Haas specifically focused on the problem of implicit instrumental theories of technology, theories which limit the way scholarly inquiry is conducted about technology. Like Haas, I argue that all discourse about technology instantiates "implicit theories about what technology is, what it does, and the kinds of relationships that people can have to it" (p. 166), theories that construct the problems that people identify as well as the methods and solutions they invent for those problems. Assumptions about technology determine how literacy technologies are constructed and used. In order to adjudicate claims—even in order to critically participate in arguments about technology and literacy—scholars, teachers, and policy participants must understand the commonplace ideas that are part of their functioning.

Selfe's study appeared in the context of President Clinton's proposal to put computers in the hands of every single child and the various responses and initiatives related to that (especially the "Technology Literacy Challenge" of 1996). In particular, Selfe was wary of the myth of technology integration as a simple panacea for literacy education. Thus, she analyzed discourse in order to see the effects theories of technology have on literacy and technology agendas (she was especially interested in inequity stemming from problems of access). Awareness of deterministic theories of technology is an "integral part of educators' larger professional responsibility to understand the way in which our culture thinks about and values literacy" (1999, p. xix). For Selfe, cultural understanding of the links between technology and literacy could readily result

in misdirected energy. These understandings aren't simple, but are instead motivated by cultural forces (government, education, business, parents) constituting "an ideological complex based on a commonsense belief in technology" (p. xxii). Discussions about technology and literacy need to be more fully informed in order to make productive, critical change (especially in policy and implementation).

New devices, new technologies, and even the aegis of online education continue to be implemented as literacy or institutional Band-Aids, sometimes with little understanding of the implications of such shifts (much less the training and infrastructure to support implementation) or driven by administrations and bottom lines rather than pedagogical choice, local need, and scholarship in the field. "Machine grading," automated assessment software, inflexible ePortfolio management systems, learning management systems, and other courseware—though not precisely tied to digital writing practices as many computers and composition scholars have defined them—are important examples of technology's empowered position in both composition and the academy. In such an age, Haas's and Selfe's now over twenty-year-old research agendas are still important and relevant to practice.

Haas's rhetorical analysis examined scholarly discourse in English Studies publications such as *College English* and *College Composition and Communication*. Selfe examined government, private sector, education, and public belief systems shaping national technological literacy programs. My research takes into

consideration samples of current scholarly discourse in journals and books, as Haas did, but the primary analysis is of online community discourse, in particular e-mail discussions on the Writing Program Administrator's mailing list (WPA-L), a contemporary space for disciplinary teacher-to-teacher discourse. Unlike other disciplinary LISTSERVs, such as TechRhet, the WPA-L is also publicly archived; this was an important part of my choice, but not the primary one. More importantly, the WPA-L has often been described as a major semipublic forum for the field (Krause, 2012; Rice, 2006; Schirmer, 2009); it is a rich site for scholarly and non-scholarly professional discourse that treats the same material as is treated in academic publications, but in a less formal manner[2]. It is an important knowledge site for composition-rhetoric, where users from writing programs and universities of diverse sizes and locations go to ask questions, share opinions, and get feedback on ideas related to disciplinary activities—research, teaching, administration, community involvement, and many other facets of compositionists' daily lives.

It is important that I point out that the particular conversants' ability to empirically stand in for "the field" or "the discipline" is not this study's primary inquiry. Although the WPA-L is widely read, it is not necessarily widely influential in terms of disciplinary practice. Even though the community may have specific

[2] As Chapter 6 discusses, the list is an important source of disciplinary identity and authority for its users.

local impact on teachers and researchers, and certainly WPA-L users consider their online community to be useful in their teaching and scholarly work as well as a source of institutional and disciplinary agency, an empirical measurement of the LISTSERV's influence is well beyond the intent and scope of this study, if such a mapping were possible in the first place. Influence is not the issue at stake in this dissertation; neither is "representativeness." This study doesn't propose to analyze "Composition Studies" or "Composition and Rhetoric" as a whole through its online discourse because the WPA-L can make no claim to be representative in its scope or centralizing in its influence. However, it is *a version* of composition, one that is public. The WPA-L is not only available for research as a conveniently archived and searchable online text, but it is a version of composition and rhetoric that includes a mixture of researchers and practitioners from an array of locations and institutions, and one that comes up as exemplary of wider disciplinary problems in texts such as Dobrin's *Postcomposition* (2011a). (Dobrin didn't fault WPA-L conversations for their failures to be especially critical, but neither did he excuse them of being exemplary of a kind of orthodox thinking.)

Clearly, texts "powerfully summon and propagate the social orders in which we live" (Stillar, 1998, p. 1), and those social orders are commonly understood from the perspective of ideological critics to go beyond the particular makeup of the specific participants in the discourse. Although this study cannot make a claim to certain representativeness in its corpus or true generalizability in its results, the participants in the discourse, because they are part of the larger

disciplinary discourses (presenting at WPA or CCCC, publishing in disciplinary research venues, sharing the field's lore through an array of venues including the WPA-L), they do participate in and manifest the disciplinary values and ideology in their discourse. In order to make my overall question more specific, then, I take up the following two questions:

2. What doxa do WPA-L discussion participants rely on when they make arguments about digital writing?

3. What underlying theories of technology shape these participants' views of digital writing?

This study takes an ideological pulse of and describes a specific slice of writing scholars and teachers, rather than claiming that it can examine the *doxa* of the central influencers of those groups[3] or make empirically representative statements about the entire field.

A series of scholars have examined slices of composition studies through its textual output, only a tiny sample of which can be pointed to here. In "NCTE/CCCC's Recent War on Scholarship," for example, Richard Haswell constructed an argument about composition by studying the "two flagstaff houses of postsecondary writing teachers" (2005, p. 199) through their

[3] If such a body even exists beyond the abstract influence of CCCC leadership or NCTE policies and recommendations. Training is highly local and idiosyncratic, and what is 'taught' is revised and iterated in practice. Tracing a network of discursive 'influence' would be a fascinating study, but certainly fraught with complexity. At about the same time I began this project, a group of CUNY graduate students started a crowd-sourced academic genealogy project called *Writing Studies Tree* (http://writingstudiestree.org).

bibliographies from 1939-1999 as compiled in the CompPile database, revealing a consistent pattern of decline in NCTE/CCCC's support for data-supported, aggregable research. In "Views from a Distance: A Nephological Model of CCCC Chairs' Addresses, 1977-2011" (2012), Derek Mueller examined CCCC chairs' addresses in order to gain insight on composition; his study connected these with *CCC* abstracts in order to get what he referred to as a "network sense," exploring concepts and linkages in order to create an assemblage of disciplinary patterns and, more importantly, values and agendas. Brian Faber, in "Rhetoric in Competition" (1996), analyzed CCCC abstracts in order to see the "disciplining process" of institutional discourse in action (p. 357), and the discursive features that typify and are rewarded by that process. These studies and others like them have reasonably focused on reading composition from the top down: a reading of its scholarly outputs or the direction of its leadership. They operate at a discipline-wide level of definition and critique.

Other ideological studies of composition and rhetoric have begun at a much more ephemeral (because unpublished) or localized (because tied to specific programs or individuals) level of academic program websites, interviews, course titles and program names, calls for papers, surveys, and even MLA job lists (Gordon, 2009; Lauer, 2009, 2012, 2013). Jean Lutz and Mary Fuller's (2007) examination of the power relationships, discourses, and constructions of composition teaching's course materials is an important example, analyzing course documentation, assignments, and syllabi to understand constructions of

authority. It is along these lines that this dissertation proceeds, examining composition and rhetoric—or one version of it, more accurately—from the middle: taking its corpus from the discourse of a specific group of constituents and their everyday texts.

As mentioned earlier, Stillar (1998) has argued that just like presidential addresses or long, formal manuscripts, mundane texts have significant and complex roles in the social orders we live in. Texts do not simply share, report on, or promulgate ideology, they make it manifest. Texts *are* motive and interest; not only—according to Stillar and other critical rhetoricians—those of the individuals involved, but also those of the social structures they participate in (1998, p. 6). A disciplinary LISTSERV, then, where participants are engaged in thinking through, sharing, and debating ideas focused specifically on composition, is likely to be a particularly dense and powerful incorporation of disciplinary values, attitudes, and commonplaces. E-mail lists, though "seemingly innocuous," are deeply ideological (Moses & Katz, 2006, p. 71). Certainly lists' promulgate ideology as technological/corporate creations; more importantly, these lists are ideological in that they play an important role in connecting widely spread members of academic communities, forming those communities even as the lists are instantiated by them. Avi Hyman argued that the LISTSERV is "one of academia's most dominant technological tools" (2003, p. 18), working like "invisible colleges, professional conventions, and journals" (p. 20) to quietly build and spread scholarly discussions. E-mail lists provide important examples of

"conversations among academic professionals devoted to furthering knowledge of and in the field" (Purdy & Walker, 2012, "The Study," para. 4). James Purdy and Joyce R. Walker's analysis of the TechRhet discussion list (along with academic blogs and Twitter activity) described how ideas shared online help to produce the knowledge of the field. These studies and others point to an understanding of the WPA-L and texts like it not solely as ephemera, but as significant discourse of composition. The ideology of composition studies is just as present in the exchanges of the WPA-L as it is in the abstracts of *College Composition and Communication*, *Research in the Teaching of English*, or *Kairos*; thus it provides just as much opportunity to glance at the ideological "state of composition" as a research piece by Smit or Porter.

Loosely connected to the Council of Writing Program Administrators (itself a major national association in composition), the WPA-L is a rich site for professional discourse that treats the same material as is treated in academic publications, but in a less formal manner[4]. Again, The WPA-L, because it is written by a wide and constantly-changing group of professionals in composition, provides an opportunity to see the motives and interests of the discipline in a more "everyday" light. These interests are not generalizable from a statistically representative sense other than for the particular participants in the list at a

[4] As do Purdy and Walker (2012), I to resist simple formal/informal scholarly/unscholarly dichotomizing of disciplinary discourse in this dissertation.

particular point in time; still, the WPA-L community is connected to the larger community of composition and rhetoric, and indicates the thinking of some slice or subset of the discipline's membership. While this analysis can only generalize about a small sample of a much larger community, future research can build upon the account I present here, describing other communities, other time periods, or other genres to create a more rich perspective of composition's rhetoric of technology.

A disciplinary mailing list, where participants are engaged in thinking through, sharing, and debating ideas focused specifically on composition, is arguably a location where disciplinary values, attitudes, and commonplaces are incorporated. Because written discourse can function as a manifestation of a group's ideology, rhetorical analysis, an important method for examining ideas in texts and making data-based inferences about them (MacNealy, 1999, p. 124), seems to be a worthy methodological choice. I report more fully on the rhetoricity of research methods in composition and the specifics of my method of rhetorical analysis in Chapters 3 and 4.

Significance: To what end?

"Identification" is one of Kenneth Burke's primary terms for thinking about persuasion. According to Burke (1966), humans rely on terministic screens, language that selects and deflects reality, to "[direct] the attention into some channels rather than others" (p. 45). Burke compared such screens to

photographs with colored filters—the picture is of the same objective reality, but selects and deflects colors to create completely different contingent realities; these symbol-screens, especially when we are unconscious of them, direct our way of thinking about the world. Terms (like "technology" or "digital writing" or "new media writing") direct observations and carry implications. In this dissertation, I focus on the commonplace notions that accompany such packed terms. Identification describes how terms put things together, how they make us consubstantial; disassociation, on the other hand, describes how they create discontinuity and take things apart. Humans persuade, according to Burke, by emphasizing or distorting commonality, making listeners identify more or less closely with particular actors or scenes in a situation by dramatizing action through particular perspectives on motives. Though this study doesn't attempt to take up a Burkean analysis in particular, his fundamental theory of how language works is an important part of this study's theoretical program. Texts include ways of thinking, not simply telling ideology, but making it. Describing the WPA-L's ways of thinking and constructing technology provides an opportunity to begin to talk about composition and rhetoric's larger rhetorics of technology and understanding the implications of that rhetoric.

In addition to the sense that language carries ideology or terministic screens, this study is influenced by the idea that rhetoric's activity is not only speaking but also *listening*. Here, I combine Krista Ratcliffe's (2005) invention activity with Wayne Booth's (2004) ideal form of rhetoric. In *Rhetorical Listening:*

Identification, Gender, Whiteness, Ratcliffe retooled Burke to describe rhetorical listening as a rhetor's "stance of openness" (2005, p. 17), one that must precede their conscious identification and be open to difference so that they may revise "troubled identifications" (p. 19) that may erase important gaps between cultural identities. Here dissonance is just as adequate a goal as harmony; while Burke seemed to demand that differences be bridged, through identification, Ratcliffe was interested in real cross-cultural communication, one that allows cultures on either side of a power dynamic to speak from their difference without having to force common ground. Through identifying problematic or "naturalized" (p. 28) discourses in ourselves, proceeding with an "accountability logic" (p. 26), and analyzing claims *alongside* cultural logics, individuals can listen to institutions and cultures and hear identifications and disidentifications in order to find more ethical or effective conduct (p. 171). Through listening purposely for what isn't said or seen (gaps that Ratcliffe called "non-identification"), individuals can recognize visions of reality that are only partial, that ignore the experiences and discourses of Others. Rhetorical listening manifests in this study in particular through a methodological understanding of rhetorical analysis as "eavesdropping," or overhearing the discourse of others in order to learn from their usage.

In *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*, Booth (2004) differentiated between "rhetoric" and one of its sub-types: "listening-rhetoric." Rhetoric is understood as the entirety of persuasive arts and methods, and can be used for producing

misunderstanding and conflict just as well as it can be used for mitigating them. Listening-rhetoric, on the other hand, is "the whole range of communicative arts for reducing misunderstanding by paying full attention to opposing views"[5]. By listening to the other side as well as to one's own responses, some form of understanding can be reached between opposing groups (p. 21). And though such understanding doesn't automatically lead to consensus (or even dissensus), it provides rhetors an opportunity to discover "topics, *topoi*, warrants to be shared with [an] opponent—agreements from which they can move as they probe their disagreements" (p. 50). In attempting to understand commonplaces, *doxa*, and ideological positions in composition and rhetoric, proceeding from a noncombative listening-rhetoric stance becomes an important ethical starting place. Even though such listening may not lead to Booth's idealized "rhetopia," it does allow for a kind of accountable understanding that can not only theorize about conflicting *doxa* but also offer ways to negotiate between them. Fundamentally, this dissertation is about listening to a slice of the discipline to interrogate the different but related ideas about technology and writing that are operative within it—not in order to describe "the field," but rather to listen to a

[5] One might also think of Peter Elbow's "believing game." In *Writing without Teachers*, Elbow describes believing as "promiscuous" invention tactic (1998, p. 185); by believing, individuals attempt to understand other positions and try to seriously ""get inside the head" of someone who sees things differently from themselves (p. 149). According to Elbow, doubting (seeking error) can't necessarily identify false assertion of meaning because there are so few universal truths. By believing all assertions, Elbow says, we can truly test them and have a "trustworthy sense that one is better than the other" (p. 163).

space within that field; future research extending on this study with other sites and methods of analysis can then explore how it connects with other rhetorics of composition and technology within the larger field-space of composition and rhetoric.

Overview of chapters

I conclude this introductory chapter with a brief overview of the rest of the dissertation.

Chapter 2

The second chapter reviews literature in composition and rhetoric in order to construct one narrative of digital writing and technology in composition research, the "official" version that appears in mainstream scholarly publications: journals, monographs, and edited collections. After defining digital writing, I outline three characteristic perspectives from which composition scholars have treated technology: technological conservatism, technological optimism, and technological critique. Composition and rhetoric *has* long spoken to issues of digital writing, but that conversation often takes place outside the central space for the discipline's knowledge-making conversation, scholarly journals such as *CCC*. Or, such conversation has been subordinated to subdisciplinary conversations, in specialist journals and publications. Although there is advanced thinking about digital writing and technology in prestige subdisciplinary conversations like *Computers and Composition* and assorted computers and

writing academic conferences, as a whole, composition and rhetoric's scholarly attention to technology is colored by a commitment to romantic humanist ideologies and characterized by a generally skeptical attitude toward technology and its enthusiasts. The themes introduced in Chapter 2 are further developed and expanded in the rhetorical analysis itself, as the members of the WPA-L community participate in—but are not necessarily limited to—the discourses typified in this chapter.

Chapter 3

In the third chapter, I describe the theoretical background for my research design, constructing a method of critical rhetorical analysis that can interrogate ideology in this complex text in an ethical and ultimately useful way. Originally described my McKerrow (2010), critical rhetoric is a method of ideological rhetorical analysis that draws on the theories of Michel Foucault to enact critiques of domination in hegemonic discourse. Working from the perspectives of McKerrow (2010), Amossy (2002a, 2002b), and McGee (1980), I develop my construct of interest, *doxa*, and detail the implications of McKerrow's principles of praxis for critical rhetoric, making the case that this method is especially appropriate for examining the fragmented, multispeaker, everyday WPA-L text. Most broadly, this chapter tries to convey the rhetorical nature of research design and methodology in general and in the specific context of this rhetorical analysis.

Chapter 4

While Chapter 3 treats rhetorical analysis methodology theoretically, Chapter 4 is much more practical. In this chapter, I describe my construction and performance of critical rhetorical analysis as a way to listen to and interrogate WPA-L. I discuss specific methods for collecting and analyzing the complex WPA-L text, especially constructing the corpus, an appropriate sample, and coding schemes. Chapter 4 presents an overview of the results of that analysis, describing central themes and *doxa*, and finally discusses the complex nature of LISTSERV messages and the complications and limitations an e-mail list presents for criticism.

Chapter 5

In the fifth chapter, I discuss my rhetorical analysis more closely, describing the most important doxastic understandings and rhetorics of technology and writing operant on the WPA-L. Chapter 5 is organized around four idea clusters: the generic relationship between the field of composition and technology, understandings of the relative newness or importance of digital writing technologies, a cluster of ideas related to agency and empowerment, and a cluster of *doxa* related to how these participants rely on an instrumentalist conception of digital writing technologies, using and describing digital writing primarily in terms of augmentation. This chapter describes in detail the doxastic notions extant in this selection of WPA-L discourse. Overall, findings seem to

align with Sidney I. Dobrin's (2011b) assessment of composition studies. Despite the "inextricable bond" between writing and technology and the now nearly unavoidable way that digital technology is invested in composition and rhetoric's scholarly and pedagogical work, composition and rhetoric's thinking seems to be "hamstrung" (p. 175). Participants in this community clearly embrace digital writing technologies, but the philosophical and doxastic perspectives evidenced in their discourse are heavily reliant on deterministic philosophies of technology and instrumental perspectives on digital tools; "ease" is also an important value for these users.

Chapter 6

After the specific findings shared in Chapter 5, the dissertation concludes by describing the implications of and future directions for this research. After framing the study in terms of Ratcliffe (2005) and Booth's (2004) rhetorical practice of listening, I discuss answers to this study's research questions, summarize the WPA-L's construction of technology, and describe the implications of this study for composition discourse, the computers and writing communities, and how it points to research.

The end result is a dissertation that explores discourse about technology in a field that—whether it wishes to deal with this fact or not—is fully imbricated in tool-rich processes, systems, and cultures. It uncovers how conservative

technological discourse in composition and rhetoric complicates and is complicated by the field's theories of writing and agency.

CHAPTER II

RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION AND TECHNOLOGY

> Technology is, like rhetoric and fire,
> a paradox of power and powerfulness.
> (Johnson, 1998, p. 111)

This chapter grapples with a range of literature in and beyond composition in order to complete three related and sometimes-overlapping tasks. First, I define the concept *digital writing* for the context of this research, working from literature outside as well as inside composition and rhetoric. Second, I sort out themes that will color the rhetorical analysis described in following chapters, including technological conservatism, technological optimism, and technological critique, in order to describe some of the field's fundamental dogma or attitudes toward computing technology and digital writing. Finally, I narrate one version of the "story" of composition and technology as it is manifested in the scholarship, an "official" version (but not a simple one) inasmuch as it is the one vetted and verified through publication in the discipline's journals and monographs. Composition *has* long spoken to issues of digital writing, but that conversation has often taken place far from the supposed centers of our knowledge-making conversation, such as scholarly journals like *College Composition and Communication*; instead, it has often been subordinated to subdisciplinary conversations in specialist journals and publications. Composition and rhetoric's mainstream inquiries into technology are limited; because they are mainstream, these representations also have the greatest potential for influencing and being

appropriated by writing teachers and administrators disconnected from apex technology discourses (Carbone, 2011).

What the digital does

An important assumption for much of the scholarship described here is that the rise of electronic and digital communication in the late twentieth century brought about change to how we experience, perform, and theorize media of all kinds, and that digital computing technology changes our social, informational, and even consumer lives, creating in one way or another a need for a *critical user*.

Nicholas Negroponte's *Being Digital* (1995) was an early exploration of "the digital." He has pointed out two "fundamental and immediate results" of media's being digital: that bits "commingle effortlessly" and that "a new kind of bit is born" (p. 18). This seemly small change from the stable media element to the commingled, always-potential because always-interchangeable bit, has had long-reaching effects. Media have become increasingly interchangeable, and because they can be mixed, used, reused, remixed, and combined in unimaginably diverse ways, the entire media landscape is changed.

The turn to the digital is not simply a shift in media, but potentially a fundamental shift in the way we order our world. David Weinberger (2007) described three "orders of order," or three ways for organizing things and information: the first order is that of objects themselves, of books on bookshelves, where one thing takes up one space, and must be organized by

experts in order to understand any large quantity of it. The second way to organize is by using metadata, of information about information, such as a catalog that helps experts and nonexperts handle complex and multiple relationships between objects in the first order. The third order is digital, the order of Negroponte's bits, which "undermine[s] some of our most deeply ingrained ways of thinking about the world and our knowledge of it" (p. 22). When information becomes digital, it becomes (or at least has the potential to become) miscellaneous: organization, expertise, and ownership have different importance in digital order because things aren't limited to specific places and predetermined data/metadata relationships.

Lev Manovich's (2001) has described a similar digital upset to standard ways of thinking about how media is composed, organized, and theorized. New media work by new principles. Digital media can be quantified and described mathematically and manipulated algorithmically. A film converted to digital media ceases to be only continuous data and becomes digital data that can be sampled and quantified, infinitely transformable and manipulable grids of pixels and numerical color or sound values (pp. 27-28). Digital media are also modular, made of independent parts that can be scaled, arranged, rearranged, and used independently of their original creation (p. 31), a process that may be manual but also at the same time automated (p. 32); the style sheet settings I used in various word processors as I composed this document can automatically change the text's layout and visual style with only minimal interaction on my part. These

processes are variable and potentially infinite. The shift to digital media is not a simple material iteration of options for publication—it is a major change in how we create, produce, and interact with the world around us.

Digital media changes the things that they carry, including language. Although language has always been multimodal (a combination of word, image, and sound), today "multimodality is more pervasive, diverse, and important today than ever before" (Gee & Hayes, 2011, p. 1). In their discussion of language and learning, James Paul Gee and Elisabeth Hayes tap into a few key narratives: digital media as an *equalizer* as well as a *polarizer*. Digital media equalize by giving writers access to audiences and vice versa, as well as enhancing the ability for marginal and nonmainstream people to find, produce, and distribute ideas. On the other hand, digital media also polarize in that they allow groups to "do their own thing" in a setting where access is not, in fact, equal (p. 3), in fact potentially polarizing groups from one another. Either way, language—and especially writing—has been altered by digital media, allowing for an already complex language system to become even more complex. If printed writing froze the breath of oral language, then digital media have unfrozen it:

> Digital media (like text messaging, Twitter, and other social media) are, in a sense, bringing language back to its conversational, interactive, here-and-now foundations. They are also bringing back concrete images and experiences, as well as metaphors, for understanding the abstract and the complex through, for example, simulations and video games. But they are doing this in quite different ways than did oral language. (2011, p. 12)

Digital media and the Internet allow humans to mine collaborative expertise and the wisdom of the crowds, but according to Gee and Hayes, we're still only just learning how to use these new relationships and functions to solve real problems; these are new experiences and ways of working that a digital world offers. Gee and Hayes reiterate a common call in composition and other disciplines dealing with the implications of digital transformation: We need to become more critical consumers of multimodal texts and better at systems thinking or what they call "nexus thinking and action" (p. 141).

Changes in technology and language reflect and participate in changes in humans' daily lived experience. Our contemporary digital lives have long been described as "constantly mediated between our physical lives and our electronic ones," lives wherein we move "between our physical spaces and our private e-spaces without thinking much about it" (Gurak, 2001, p.9). Today, our physical spaces are layered with digital spaces, and our e-spaces are much more public and attached to our daily existence. Depending on how one reads it, change has either accelerated to where we are tempted to think even less about it, or it has accelerated to the point that we are increasingly reminded of it. In her study, *Cyberliteracy* (2001), Laura J. Gurak's concern is not with a level of determinism inherent in the technology, but instead the power of big corporations in the future of the Internet and digital life. Major actors include Microsoft and Hasbro rather than computers, wires, and wireless spaces. For Gurak, the call to be critical means that users must carefully attend not simply to their technology, but

to the ways that their technology (and of course, information) are being implemented and managed by corporations in the interest of corporate intellectual property.

If Gurak, Gee and Hayes, and others have been concerned with social changes that digitally mediated language encourages, other scholars in writing and composition studies have been interested more in how these social and technological changes affect writing practices. J. David Bolter, in *Writing Space* (2001) has made a similarly transformational argument, mostly emphasizing the concept of remediation, the flexibility of hypertext as writing space, and the technological-material nature of all writing. David Baron's *A Better Pencil* (2009) also makes this case, stressing that the written styles, forms, and social functions that we value are deeply tied to the materials with which writing is produced. Baron's primary point was that digital writing (he focuses mostly on hypertext) is different from that which comes from the "late age of print" (p. 2). Those aspects of writing that seem to us at any one moment natural or essential (linear arguments, a particular visual/alphabetic relationship, a particular understanding of how knowledge is organized) are situated and dynamic, continually being remediated and remade by the medium that comes next, despite our strongest instincts toward interiorization. Digital, computerized writing allows for much greater flexibility and dynamism, but its dynamism also "threatens the definitions of good writing and careful reading that have developed in association with the technique of printing" (p.4).

Another classic transformation argument has been offered by Michael Palmquist (1998), who noted that the discipline of composition "is making a technological transition, with access to computers and networks changing how we think about writing and writers" (p. *xiii*). In this early text, however, Palmquist's argument is limited to how computers make composing easier, rather than changing the act of composing itself (p. 211). James Kalmbach (1997) has argued that for entire generations of writers, writing technologies have been taken for granted, with "the visual limitations of a single, monospaced, monosized typeface [helping to] define who we were" (p. 53). These textual relationships, so long taken for granted, have been disrupted by digital media, which challenge genres, structures, and the tradition of text's dominance over graphics[6].

A rhetoric of technological determinism—the sense that technologies determine the course of culture and society—is common today, with popular texts such as Kelly's *What Technology Wants* (2010) filling digital and traditional bookshelves. For Bolter (2001), a problem with determinism is that when technologies seem to be self-evident and self-defining, we become predisposed to thinking of a particular kind of writing as natural. His concern with determinism is that thinking of technology as autonomous renders the human writer and reader relatively impotent before a set of powerful assumptions: that

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[6] A "turn to the visual" in print media has been a major part of Gunther Kress' (1999) research program;

technologies are the way they are, that writing works a particular way and has particular qualities because of the nature of reality, and that structures of writing are tied to structures of reality (as opposed to recognizing that structures of thinking are tied to patterns of language use, memory, culture, and interiorization).

Defining digital writing

As it is sometimes used in rhetoric and composition, the term "technology"—and with it the term "digital writing," which I am relying on this dissertation—can be unhelpfully broad. The central "technology" that I mean to refer to is the networked computer, though even that distinction is fuzzy, since it includes a range of objects including real and virtual servers, desktop and laptop computers, wired and wireless devices, fully mobile devices, and all of their assorted paraphernalia. This network of objects also includes the attendant new genres, modes of production, and models for process, authorship, and subjectivity that accompanies the network computer. Such a network also includes an array of software, which may be anywhere in a range from proprietary to open-access, from single-function apps to deeply complex software suites; not to mention websites, physical and virtual communities, and affinity spaces that link all these together in nearly unmappable ways.

This technology, connected well beyond itself and distributing human action and consciousness across time and space, offers new objects and processes

to theorize about, objects and processes which differ (sometimes significantly) from those described in traditional composition process-product models. As Dànielle N. DeVoss, Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, and Troy Hicks (2010) have argued in *Because Digital Writing Matters,* networked computers have changed the ecology of composing, the process and rhetorical dynamics of writing, even the very meaning of writing itself. Thus, digital writing has become a contested political object in the often conservative field of composition and rhetoric.

I find the simple definition offered in *Because Digital Writing Matters* helpful: digital writing includes "compositions created with, and oftentimes for reading or viewing on, a computer or other device that is connected to the Internet" (2010, p. 7). "Compositions" runs a broad gamut, from PowerPoint to WordPress, from instant messages to wiki text, from YouTube videos to Web forum posts, from .txt to .pdf to .html to Facebook comment. In fact, the broadness of that list is one reason for the contested grounds of discussion about technology in composition. Digital writing is, in short, expanding the list of what counts in composition (Johnson-Eilola & Selber, 2009, p. 15). And although there are good cases to be made that this sort of writing doesn't necessarily *do* anything beyond disrupting the invisibility of our always-already-postmodern medium, the reality of digital writing complicates a number of things. In doing so, it forces us to look closely, both at the technology and its effects and "outward to the changing literacy in the world around us" (Lanham, 1995, p. 17).

In terms of writing, digital writing has often been understood as a challenge to what have long been seemingly stable, printed texts. Authors such as Bolter (2001) and Lanham (1995) have written extensively in their early arguments about how computer writing, especially hypertext, fundamentally upsets the writing we associate with books, newspapers, magazines, and the rest. Though the early book-death enthusiasm that hypertext inspired has largely passed, the velocity and ubiquity of networked computing technology does affect a series of transformations on what the academy understands as "writing." Borrowing somewhat from McKee and DeVoss's *Digital Writing Research*, I will describe three basic shifts that digital writing brings to composition:

First of all, networked or digital writing takes place in a transformed composing environment. We are, as Anne F. Wysocki would say, more aware of the weaving in the rug under our feet than we have been for a long time (2004, p. 2). Our writing is mediated by a wide array of software and hardware, and is distributed across multiple spaces. We write both alone and together, in synchronous as well as asynchronous environments (Corso & Williamson, 1999, p. 33). No longer can we safely engage in the fiction of the inspired writer composing alone in his dorm or office, making laborious snowbound treks to the library for information. The writer's data is always immediately at hand and also immediately manipulable (Manovich, 2001). With the continuing spread of wireless and mobile computing, our composing environment is one that increasingly intersects with our daily lives such that we never seem not to be

composing (Alexander & Rhodes, 2010, p. 133), indeed so much so that some writers don't even think of themselves as composing in the first place (Clark, 2010, p. 32). We are surrounded with information, and drenched in digital writing.

Digital writing has also transformed what we understand about authorship and ownership, including collaboration and audience participation. Even before the advent of ubiquitous networking in everyday computing, writers such as Tharon Howard (1996/2004) recognized ways that electronic text revised the idea of the author as sole textual authority. No longer is the writer the tyrant, as Marilyn Cooper (1999) noted; the reader is not simply a passive consumer (p. 141). Furthermore, authors don't even have to be experts; in a landscape of digital composing, amateurs can establish textual authority, incorporating scholarly citations, visuals, and the ethos of high readership as easily as doctors of philosophy and skilled technical professionals. Instead, texts are often understood as products of communities—something they may have always been, as literary intertextual theorists have long surmised, but something that we are ever more reminded of in the advent of easy access to increasingly wikified texts, texts from which writers can steal as easily as they might contribute. Collaboration has ceased to be a turn-taking process and now includes dynamic coauthoring; people can and do work with teams in a fast-changing environment, "[behaving] more intelligently than any individual by pooling and distributing knowledge" (Gee & Hayes, 2011, p. 108). When texts are

digital, the process of manipulating, slicing, versioning, remixing, and automating texts becomes simple, and thus the author becomes the DJ, sampling rather than originating. Invention fully ceases to be sitting and thinking or even just sitting and writing, and becomes an openly nonlinear and appropriation-driven process of selection and reapplication of textual, cultural, and media materials (Rice, 2007, p. 62). And audiences have ceased to simply be audiences[7]; they can interact, comment, participate, and coauthor (McKee & DeVoss, 2007, p. 10).

Along with transformations of authorship models, digital writing has transformed the modes of delivery that "count" in composition. Remixable texts, and the "return" of performance and orality (Fishman, Lunsford, McGregor, & Otuteye, 2005; Lunsford, 2006; Ong, 2002) to the composition classroom through video, podcasting, and various web media have reconfigured our notions of what might count as a "well-formed text" (Bernhardt, 1993, p. 410). In *The Economics of Attention*, Richard Lanham (2006) called this sort of "kinetic text" a movable feast of opportunity for delivery modes (p. 83). The explosion of genres that have come to our attention is fairly self-evident, with writers such as Sirc (2009) going so far as to idealize the iTunes music review as high rhetorical production. A series of writers in *Computers and Composition* have argued that the "return" of delivery to our attention is among the most significant changes brought about in

[7] Clay Shirky (2010) calls them "The People Formerly Known as the Audience" in *Cognitive Surplus* .

the last few years (Lunsford, 2006, p. 170). Andrea Lunsford has gone so far as to define writing itself as a technology for performing (p. 171). Porter has made a similar case, arguing that Internet-based communication demands retheorization of delivery as we confront the issues of access, distribution, and interaction that accompany changes in delivery. That which is produced goes everywhere (whether it is "published" or not); such a model introduces a host of new questions about production and consumption for composition in both theory and classroom.

These writing-specific changes engendered by digital writing technology are also connected to changes in social behavior and learning in general—or if not changes in the behaviors themselves, changes in how we understand those behaviors. Networked computers have afforded us the ability to see more writers doing more and different things; self-organizing in "passionate affinity spaces" (Gee & Hayes, 2011, p. 69) as media and audiences commingle. Thus, it is shifting our theories—in particular about literacy, intelligence, and cognition.

A common move in scholarship about technology and writing is to redefine literacy. In "Becoming Literate in the Information Age," Hawisher and Selfe (2004) describe the need for understanding a *technological literacy* that connects social practice, people, technology, values, and literate activity; they encourage highly localized definitions of literacy, recognizing that schools are no longer the only gateway to digital literacy. Gurak's cyberliteracy is a matter of fundamental control of the self. Michael Knievel (2009) has argued that we must

cease our talk about literacy and instead talk about *multiliteracy* (p. 103), and Anne F. Wysocki and Johndan Johnson-Eilola (1999) have shown that *literacy* itself may be a failed, constrictive metaphor (p. 356). Kelli Cargile-Cook (2002) has taxonomized a slate of six interrelated and layered literacies that technical communication programs must consider (p. 5). We no longer think about literacy solely in terms of book-and-pencil behavior; rather, it is something that encompasses technology and culture at many levels.

Digital writing is also challenging our notions of intelligence. In *Out of Our Minds,* Ken Robinson (2011) argued that the rapid changes in technology and immense availability of information have clearly problematized our traditional (i.e. nineteenth-century or Enlightenment) notions of intelligence, and that education systems in the US and England no longer teach or reward creativity and ingenuity. However, it is these qualities that are most needed in the global digital world. Education (and with it the workplace, he argues) needs to engage and reward imagination, creativity, and innovation (pp. 2–3). Robinson has called for an expanded notion of intelligence that includes but is not limited to rational and analytic academic intelligence (p. 123). The separation of creative art and academic learning, of reason and emotion, and 'creatives' and 'suits' in the workplace are all reinforced by the notion that "creativity is a rare talent" (p. 3). Robinson's point is similar to Gee and Hayes' description of systems thinking as a key skill in global knowledge economy: "being able to think about and work with others to deal with complexity and complex systems" (2011, p. 73). Johndan

Johnson-Eilola (2004) also has described how modes of knowledge like collaboration, experimentation, abstraction, and systems thinking are encouraged and rewarded in what he refers to as the post-industrial age (p. 186). Though these aren't necessarily changes in behavior brought by technology (such thinking has likely gone on before), they are changes demanded of learning institutions as a result of the new ways we relate to information through our networked devices.

Theories of human cognition and consciousness have long played an important role in composition and rhetoric. Gail S. Corso and Sandra C. Williamson have argued that digital technology more properly reflects the postmodern cognitive condition—that consciousness is not a function of a discrete interior self (as the page would have us believe), but the self in relation to others (1999, p. 43). A number of authors have written about distributed cognition, the idea that we think through our bodies, through "smart technologies'' from eyeglasses to fax machines and medications, or through computers, all of which "expand and shape […] cognitive function" (Reid, 2007, p. 10). Kenton P. O'Hara, Alex Talor, Willliam Newman, and Abigail J. Sellen (2002) have pointed out that the cognitive theories of Flower and Hayes (1981) and others, which conceive of writing as a largely internal mental process, ignore contexts and artifacts of writing tasks. They argue that the ways writers interact with texts and other objects as they compose hybrid tasks in technological

environments show how human cognition is "distributed across internal and external structures—across people, artifacts, space and time" (2002, p. 271).

All of this change is not all necessarily beneficial (although benefit is generally a matter of point-of-view). First of all, digital spaces can serve to exacerbate the already-existing inequities in our education system. Melinda Turnley (2009) has noted that wireless networks, for example, are often presented as "neutral spaces that automatically equalize all environments and student positions" (p. 88). However, networks also reinscribe social inequities by emphasizing access and mobility among groups that may not have much of either (Turnley is concerned with Hispanic students in particular). The utopian myths of universal agency, digital nativity, and inherent democracy have not always come true on the Internet. Scholars have also long argued that networked computing seriously problematizes the traditional walled-off and increasingly expensive university, some arguing that it will dissolve the "proscenium classroom" and its theatrical consumption-only delivery model of learning (Barker & Kemp, 1990, p. 16). From the perspective of the institution, such a change is potentially a threat. Digital networks upset expertise models as individuals increasingly turn to other amateurs for knowledge and information. And as digital media increases in velocity, the potential for affective, un-critical writing—the gut response, the anonymous flame, the cyber-bully—only increases (Alexander & Rhodes, 2010, p. 146), as do the very personal dangers of retributive semi-anonymous audiences. Careful thought and ease do not often go hand-in hand; Bradley Dilger (2008), for

example, has connected ease in online communication to the ways that TV watching encourages consumption rather than analysis (p. 121). Finally, from a design and rhetoric perspective, the ease with which digital media can be generated from templates or copied from other sources potentially undermines *craft*, as well. Kristen L. Arola (2010), for example, has written that Web 2.0 structures render form invisible, inevitably making students and writers unable to engage with design and production thoughtfully. Velocity and ease don't necessarily make for careful composition, engaged listening rhetorics, and enhanced intersubjective agency. Digital writing is, as all things, a mixed bag.

Composition and humanist ideology

Despite all of this change, mixed as it is, composition's traditional narratives of composition as a generally unified set of disciplinary identities resulting from a set of conferences in the early 1960s remain "unchallenged and accepted as de facto history" (Rice, 2007, p. 16), locked into the terminological screen of a humanist identification. Rice's study in particular shows a concern with the terms and definitions in the disciplinary vocabulary, and how those terms are exclusionary, pushing away computers, digital rhetorics, and communication studies. In this dissertation, I am concerned with the same ideological impulse; not necessarily with the terms themselves, but with the lines of thinking and doxastic conceptions of technology and writing that work in the arguments those terms are used in. However, terminology (like "technology" or

"digital writing") can be a useful way of thinking of this doxastic problem. Restriction and control of definitions are ideological, controlling "the field's perception of itself and ability to re-present itself in a variety of ways, especially if those ways conflict or disrupt our expectations" (Rice, 2007, p. 19). Claire Lauer (2009) also shows a concern with terms. Her *Computers and Composition* article examines how composition's use of the terms "multimodal" and "multimedia" are contingent on context and audience, rather than definition, and that in fact there is "little consensus" (p. 229) on how such terms should be used and what they ought to refer to.

Definitional precision (including an attention to the history and context of terms) is important because it displays shared understanding and creates the opportunity for persuasion; and the abundance and velocity of technological development has generated a series of seemingly interchangeable words: multimodal, digital, and multimedia are the tip of a terminological iceberg. Lauer's study showed that within the discipline, "multimodal" was a preferred theoretical descriptor, while in public and industry contexts, "multimedia" was more commonly used. Her conclusion, that a difference in usage is connected to a difference of emphasis on process and deliverables (respectively), is exemplary of the ideological nature of definitions that Rice described. For Lauer, instructors especially should be aware of and responsive, if not to the ideology of terms, at least to the sorts of terms favored by those locations that students will eventually write in (business, administration, grant-writing, industry, and etcetera).

Composition's terminology does not need to rely on public terminology, of course; the discipline has a right to its own language. However, the changing communicative and media landscape of our culture would seem to demand other kinds of changes in the discipline. Changes ranging from the discursive and practical to the philosophical and orthodoxic.

Composition and rhetoric has yet to seriously address unattended-to rhetorics of digital culture (Rice, 2009 p. 14) and the changes I have described thus far; the digital makes new rhetorical, theoretical, and practical demands upon our assumptions in composition. Much of our disciplinary identity and instructions were (at the time of Rice's publication) forty years old and at the time of their creation already missing the communicative changes that they were contemporary with. Rice had in mind the specific moment of 1963: North named this the "start date" for composition as a contemporary discipline, and 1963 marks the rhetorical revival of Edward P. J Corbett's experience of the CCCC, and the teaching and research agendas of James M. McCrimmon, Albert R. Kitzhaber, and Richard Braddock. All of these, Rice argues, ignored contemporary issues of visual and technological change.

Similarly, Kathleen Welch (1999) argued that computer screens have already become normal, and that this fact of contemporary literacy has been "ignore[d] or, worse, jeer[ed] at" for far too long by the humanities (p. 4); though open jeering is less common today, a certain amount of disdain for technology is not hard to locate among composition and rhetoric professionals. Such a- and

anti-technological biases have a long history in the humanities, even beyond the history and culture of composition and rhetoric. C.P. Snow's well-known thesis in *The Two Cultures and The Scientific Revolution* (1959) was that the academic world is divided into two cultures: scientific and literary (further intensifying this problem is a further split within the scientific culture between the intellectual and the pragmatic). Each world has a "distorted image" of the other, a "gulf of mutual incomprehension" that ranges from mild befuddlement to open hostility (p. 4). Humanist and literary scholars see scientists and technologists as shallowly optimistic to the point of being unethical. The humanists, on the other hand, display an inattention to technology, an ignorance of scientific culture, and, Snow argued, an inability to understand or accept even the industrial revolution. (That is, "traditional culture" (p. 24) of English education became abstracted from culture even as it reaped the economic benefits of industrial change; taking part in the applied science revolution was left to tinkerers and handymen, while intellectuals continued to write about the horrors of urbanization and industrialization, idealizing life at Walden pond.)[8]

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[8] Stephen Toulmin (1990) was similarly concerned about this divide in *Cosmopolis*; he argues that the intellectual agenda of Cartesianism had "set aside the tolerant, skeptical attitude of the 16th-century humanists and focused on the 17th-century pursuit of mathematical exactitude and logical rigor, intellectual certainty and moral purity" (p. x). Positivism's search for certainty and formal rationality—in such personae as Descartes and Leibniz—attempts to disconnect philosophy and science from context. Toulmin argued that post-modernity should be a return to the united scientific and humanistic reasonableness of pre-modern holistic thinkers such as Montaigne and Aristotle. For Toulmin, more of the fault would seem to be with a Cartesianism that divides concerns with natural processes and the practical world from intellectual and moral

Such a lack of acceptance of a revolution is characteristic of the humanities today, as they fail to adapt—or adapt too slowly—to social and technological change. Reliance on industrial mass-education models, argued Robinson (2011), have limited our notions of intelligence and creativity and encouraged a divide between arts and sciences that doesn't reward the creativity he sees as necessary for the kind of technological change we're living through in the 21st century. Fred O. Kemp (2005a), in "The Aesthetic Anvil: The Foundations of Resistance to Technology and Innovation in English Departments," argued that the contemporary English department (the site of so much writing and technical communication instruction in the U.S.) remains deeply inhibited by the same 19th century assumptions that Snow described nearly fifty years earlier.

Describing the "religious aestheticism" and "19th century sanctification of literature and overt rejection of business, materialism, and the scientific method" stemming from the Romantics and developed by Matthew Arnold, Kemp argued that these ideological positions have only helped to exacerbate the kind of bifurcation that Snow described. In English departments in particular, business and science innovation represent immoral institutional assaults on humans and nature; any change and progress that has occurred in humanist consciousness has resulted from communication technology and economic forces rather than

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humanity. Toulmin's goal was to humanize science and technology, while much of this dissertation is concerned with an opposite but deeply related stance: technologizing humanism.

progressive ideologies (2005a, p. 80). Snow pointed out that the humanities couldn't understand urban poverty because it couldn't understand the opportunity that the industrial city opened for the poor (p. 26), and in the same way, Kemp has pointed out that the freely-flowing information and digital media so suspect to literary humanists have long been and will continue to be a major force for taking the teeth out of the kinds of brutality that we saw so often in the twentieth century—such seeing itself being part of the "undercut[ting]" that Kemp described (p. 80). Again, the digital changes.

Composition and technological ideology

As described earlier, a series of theorists inside and beyond composition and rhetoric has long argued for the importance of attending to medium and technology, or to the shifts digital communication has brought to our understanding of writing and rhetoric. Some of this call to attend is enthusiastic, reckoning technology as a possible savior of the humanities and the creative/rhetorical disciplines; at the very least, it is a remotivator of composition. Other calls to pay attention clamor for a critical consciousness—a careful examination of what we're adopting without headfirst exacerbation of already-existing social, cultural, or institutional inequities. As certain digital writing technologies have become normalized in (even naturalized to?) composition, attitudes as reflected in our scholarship seem to fall out roughly

into three groups: those who embrace all that technology is and can do, those who hold it at arm's length, and those who would rather not hold it at all.

Much of current composition-rhetoric discourse, when it speaks to technology (*if* it does) tends to be optimistic or critically engaged. What seems to be rare—at least in academic journals—is a deeply conservative stance to technology. Although Luddism in its pure form is rare in the scholarly discourse, it is nonetheless still a feature in academic press sources like *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. A recent piece by Hieronymi (2012), "Don't Confuse Technology With College Teaching," is exemplary of a rhetoric in higher education that lauds the "labor-intensive" (par. 13) requirement of "one mind engaging with another, in real time" (par. 3), rather than a model that incorporates new forms of collaborative communication and information presentation. It seems sometimes that one could pick and article at random from the *Chronicle*'s website and easily find a comment arguing for "the inherent superiority of printed text to irresponsible online drivel" (Kaufman, 2009). Though these publications (online, of course) are not representative of attitudes in composition, I would challenge the reader to consider how much this attitude substantially permeates composition and other English and humanities circles on an informal, unpublished, but no less ideological, basis; the scholarly and press publications of scholars such as Mark Bauerlein are important exemplars.

In *Electric Rhetoric*, Kathleen Welch (1999) critiqued composition and rhetoric's "bromides," the insincere platitudes and ideological warrants that

ground the disciplines existence in the university: "good writing is necessary for good citizenship;" "writing empowers a student to discover who she is;" "writing helps the student to understand his thoughts and feelings;" and "it is self-evident that taking writing courses is good for you" (p. 55). These doxastic assertions rely not only on "pseudo-Romantic modernist ideas" about the individual's subjectivity, but also, as Baron (2009) argued, appear in concert with ideas about the naturalness of handwriting or the essentiality of certain writing materials (especially the codex as the apex of human thought). Extreme "TeknoFear" of the kind that Baron (2009, p. 19) wrote about exists, and though such deeply vitriolic "open jeering" about technology (Welch, 1999) is rare in composition-rhetoric's scholarly press, it is arguable that much of what goes for digital rhetorical instruction in universities is simply traditional written composition-rhetoric taking place on a computer. As one of my own colleagues has put it, far too much composition instruction is focused on using Microsoft Word as a "glorified typewriter." This teaching method is not in of itself wrong, but when it's a feature of pedagogy that purports to be forward-looking or current-thinking, such a method seems to be entirely theory-unconscious and thus of questionable real value. At any rate, a theorized perspective on technology and writing has long been rare in mainstream composition journals. Much of the digital writing and rhetoric discussion appears in monographs and edited collections, or scholarly sites including *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, or

Computers and Composition . The following sections of this chapter outline parts of this conversation among optimists and critics.

Techno-optimists

Composition has a history of being ill-at-ease with technology, as Porter (2007) has pointed out; however, the techno-optimist has been around for some time in composition and in rhetoric. Much of the scholarly writing in Haas' (1996) discourse analysis, for example, often has an explicit rhetorical goal: to "generate enthusiasm" for engaging with technology from the humanities' perspective, and some of the texts I've described earlier in the chapter, such as Bolter (2001) and Kalmbach (1997), and Palmquist (1998). Eight of the ten texts Haas described make arguments that may not be unilaterally riddled with fireworks for the implications of hypertext, computer word processing, and technology for the humanities, but they do rely on arguments that technology is revolutionary and that such change is not only inevitable, but something that should redirect the attention of those who study rhetoric and writing.

Some of these techno-rhetoricians, like Ong (2002) are abundant in their enthusiasm and, like Kemp (2005a), often blunt as they call the humanities to task. Exemplary among these is the already-mentioned Lanham (1995, 2006), whose basic thesis is optimistic—electronic expression is salvific, redemptive of the western tradition: it has come "not to destroy the Western arts and letters, but to fulfill them" (1995, p. *xiii*). This salvation, however, is not simply

preservation but transfiguration. Electronic text redefines what a text is: it is not simply manipulable and convertible, but is also "volatile and interactive" (p. xi); rather than being staid and philosophical, electronic text is deeply rhetorical in its "plasticity" (p. xi); it undermines legal structures with subversive democratic suggestions, and it most of all puts "the major questions of our current intellectual agenda into a new relationship and sheds new light on them" (p. xiii).

All texts are what Lanham called "permanently bi-stable" (that is, our attention oscillates between focusing on surface and meaning in a text according to an entire array of textual, cultural, and behavioral factors. This bi-stable quality exists regardless of medium, in that it exists because the text occurs in specific media. The electronic text, because it is less fixed than a clay tablet or newsprint page, oscillates more dramatically and rearranges our expectations about text. It reminds us that printed prose is deeply stylized, reminds us that (like Haas pointed out) literacy is dependent upon deliberate artifice rather than "native transparency" (p. 9).

Lanham updated this argument in *The Economics of Attention* (2005), reiterating his call to consider rhetoric as attention studies, something profoundly ready to do theorizing and teaching in an "attention economy." The major new ground of the text involves this notion, which he contrasts to the popular idea of the information economy. We live in an information-glutted economy where full human attention is scarce and therefore highly valuable. Attracting attention is the basis of a new sort of non-agricultural and non-

industrial economy. In such a world, Lanham argued, "Economists are to be found in strange new places" (p. 8)—the rhetorician, the stylist, and the aesthete become economists.

Thus the arts and letters, fluff and avant-gardism, design education and attention to "kinetic text" (p. 83) become the most important elements of a sound and culturally-responsible education system:

> The arts and letters, which create attention structures to teach us how to attend to the word, must be central to acting in the world as well as to contemplating it. The design of an object, in such a world, becomes as important as the engineering of the object. The "positioning in the market" of an object, a version of applied drama, will be as important as either one. The launch of a movie will be as important as the movie itself. No "for its own sake" arguments are required. Such knowledge is immediately useful in the world. A liberal education matters in a world of fluff. (p. 14)

Liberal education becomes design education. The rhetorical activity at the center of this education is Lanham's favorite rhetorical figure coinage: oscillatio, a kind of hyperactive negative capability; a multidirectional attention-tasking that moves between self-conscious and un-self-conscious attention to a rhetorical action.

Lanham's early optimism for hypertext's redemptive possibility is shared by Bolter (2001). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *Writing Space* is partly concerned with the problem of naturalization (roughly synonymous with Ong's "interiorization," or the process of media becoming so immediate that it becomes difficult to recognize them as technology) as it affects our attitudes toward the shift from print writing spaces to digital ones. Bolter reminds us that despite

arguments to the contrary, oral poetry is no more or less natural than writing, which is no more or less natural than writing on a screen. We cannot, as many humanists would idealize, "isolate ourselves from technology by reverting to older methods of writing" (p. 17). No writing technology is natural[9], however, a technology's cultural construction can "predispose us toward a particular definition of 'natural' writing" (p. 21). Naturalness is relative, rather than biological.

This enculturated sense that particular (i.e. older or more traditional) writing technologies are more natural participates in a larger rhetoric of technological determinism, which makes the basic claim that in a variety of ways, technologies determine the course of culture or society. Naturalization or interiorization are challenged by remediation, the ways that the medium that comes next refashions the medium that came before it. Changes in our writing space reinforce that the aspects of writing that seem to us at any one moment natural or essential (linear arguments, a particular visual/alphabetic relationship, a particular understanding of how knowledge ought to be organized) are situated and dynamic. For Bolter, the digital *is* changing writing, but rather than a singular revolution, the digital transformation of text is part of the continually shifting relationship between writing, technology, and humanity.

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[9] Baron (2009) shared a similar concern.

The shift to the computer does, as many teachers complain, threaten definitions of good writing and careful reading, but this is nothing new, and perhaps, Bolter argues, nothing to be fearful of.

Hypertext itself never exactly flowered as Landow, Bolter, and others (those in hypertext literature circles, for example) prophesied. But the optimism that guided early discourse around newly-technologized text has continued in current discourse about digital writing. In *Because Digital Writing Matters* (2010), DeVoss et al. argue that the sweeping shift to digital writing is not just a change in backdrop or medium, against which the writing act and actors move essentially unchanged—an attitude they suggest is common (p. 36). Digital writing is part of a world that "is different in important ways from the world we have known" (p. 36), where people are behaving in different literate ways as well as using different literacy technologies to do things that were once at least relatively impossible. They are enthusiastic about composition professionals taking stock of and participating in "dramatic changes" (p. 4).

Computers, for example, simplified elements of the work process (i.e. the ways documents are cut and pasted or proofread facilitated by computers), but also complicated writing in allowing for multimedia and giving writers new spaces to compose and share texts. For DeVoss et al., the key shift (or the key reason for the shift) is the networked computer and attendant devices (p. 4). New ecology and practices (new models of distribution) came with the network that didn't simply come with the new models of desktop publishing that the personal

computer and word processing software brought in. The "digital revolution," according to *Because Digital Writing Matters*, is not that the computers exist or are becoming more accessible, but in what's actually done with them—in how the technology has changed writing, the writing process, and all of the social and cultural changes those imply and participate in (p. 20). In fact, *Because Digital Writing Matters* goes so far as to claim that "digital writing improves student writing overall" (p. 36).

As Porter (2007) has criticized, much of composition's optimistic discourse takes place specifically within the pages of *Computers and Composition*. Some of the discourse around computers and composition is openly prophetic: in Bill Hart-Davidson and Steven D. Krause's "Re: The Future of Computers and Writing: A Multivocal Textumentary" (2004) the authors worked from an assumption that the field of computers and writing "will cease to be different" from composition and rhetoric (p. 147) and closes with the ebullient demand/question: "Does this wireless network change everything or what?!" (p. 158). Working from the 2011 Computers and Writing Conference, Janice R. Walker et al's (2011) lengthily-titled "Computers and Composition 20/20: A Conversation Piece, or What Some Very Smart People Have to Say about the

Future" (2011) collected and presented a Burkean parlor's-worth of optimistic techno-rhetoric, provided as explicit inspiration for further conversation.[10]

In one historical review of the literature, Knievel (2009) described how computers and writing has challenged and organized itself in relation to the concept of humanism. Like technical communication navigating the relationship between humanism and computers is often an organizing principle for the field of computers and writing and how it defines itself in the larger context of the academy and—specifically—of English studies. From the beginning, Kneivel noted, "efforts to forge a bond between technology and humanities have proved challenging" (p. 93). Computers and writing has historically been doubly marginalized—not only is it a development of an already marginalized discipline called composition, but it is even worse unconcerned at all with the belletristic (i.e. literary) aspects of computing and texts. As part of the threatening "instrumental world of technology and science" (p. 95), computers and writing has historically been unconventionally humanistic—dealing with the core ideas of humanism, but challenging the hegemony of literary studies' concepts of consumption of text, textual/cultural permanence, ethics, and authorship.

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[10] Much of this rhetoric colors the pages of *Computers and Composition*, and an entire follow-up study could examine the enthusiasms of technorhetoric in that journal, but as this departs from my attention to mainstream composition publications, my coverage of it needs must be brief and focused.

Furthermore, as Knievel has claimed, computers and writing challenges the very definition of a "humanistic concern" (p. 99) in its total inversion of consumption by production—*C&W* makes the case that production is deeply humanistic, and a focus on consumption is jarringly unethical in the changed paradigms of multiliteracy, read/write knowledge culture, and expanded notions of text in digital arenas. Though it is unlikely that we will soon embrace the term "posthuman," the field of computers and writing is certainly refashioning humanism into a post-literary and post-Arnoldian model: "computers and writing has quietly relocated itself from a shadowy position peripheral to the humanistic conversation and asserted a position firmly within it" (p. 103). Though we must still—because our institutions are old-fashioned—answer the question "what's so humanistic about computers and writing?" Knievel predicts a time near in the future where the version of humanities that this discipline presents is increasingly legitimized inside the academy. The growth of interest and publication in digital humanities in recent years is certainly evidence of this legitimization.

Like Knievel, many of the optimists are less bombastic in their rhetoric than Lanham, Bolter, and Sirc; however, they are no less optimistic, arguing that the digital *remotivates* composition—or that, at least, it ought to. In her 2004 *CCC* recomposition of her CCCCs chair's address, Yancey claims that literacy is experiencing "tectonic change" (p. 298), creating new genres, new writers, new readers, even new definitions of writing at every moment. For composition, once

an institutional gatekeeper discipline serving FYC, there is a mismatch between our theory and our practice. Despite our debates over technology in classrooms and curricula and whether we confine teaching efforts to print only, print predominantly, or postmodernist infobits, and despite our continued overwhelming reliance on correct print-only texts as a mode of instructional delivery, our own publishing and presenting practices "suggest that we have already committed to a theory of communication that is both/and: print and digital" (p. 307). Composition, Yancey argues, must engage with a new vocabulary, a new set of practices, and a new set of outcomes as technological changes transform literacy.

In Bazerman's (2008) *Handbook of Research on Writing*, Wysocki has argued that digiality "reframes" writing. She claimed this relationship is especially true of visual and other multimodal texts, but all digital texts change the ways we think about and participate in productive and analytical rhetoric. Writing is now more obviously collaborative and open and multimedia, rather than individual and closed and solely alphabetical; such reconceptualizations disrupt and provoke anxiety in those who "value the word as what links us" and those who "believe writing arises from a singular individual" (p. 608). As collaborative writing and alternate cultures of communication, such as gaming cultures, engage individuals in forming their identity, our attention should shift away from thinking that this activity is enacted primarily by writing. The very nature of what it means to be a writer is up for grabs, as McKee and DeVoss

(2009) noted in their introduction to *Digital Writing Research*. Their title term, "digital writing," reflects "an explicit argument for the changing nature of what it means to write and to be a writer in a world increasingly influenced by digital technologies" (p. 10). They describe transformations embedded in that term: transformed composing environments, transformed modes of authorship and ownership, transformed modes of delivery, transformed modes of collaboration, and transformed modes of interaction, commentary, an participation.

Attention to such transformation must not only be at the theoretical level, but at the administrative and brick-and-mortar institutional level, too. Amy Kimme Hea (2009) introduces her collection, *Going Wireless*, by exhorting WPAs and writing teachers to think and act carefully, as a "migration to wireless and mobile technologies means a shift in the pedagogical and curricular spaces typically reserved for writing instruction" (p. 2). That is, teachers and researchers in rhetoric and composition must—for the sake of their own influence on curricula— "become better informed about the far-reaching discourses and practices of wireless and mobile technologies" (p. 3). The responsibility Hea describes is the same one that scholars like Haas and Lanham have spent careers declaiming, and that Selfe has called for openly and more than once: in a context of change, and when change results as it inevitably does in new programs, critical consciousness about discourses and practices is connected to agency.

Techno-critics

If some of composition's calls to attend have been optimistic in nature, many are more guarded in tone. A healthy "paying attention" has often meant calls for a critical consciousness—a careful examination without headfirst leaping. These techno-critics engage in interrogating digital writing, technology, and the systems they are imbricated with in order to take forward steps based on *phronesis*, practical wisdom. They do not fully resist technology, and neither do they rush to it headlong. Instead, they investigate and interrogate carefully, taking a measured approach to digital writing technologies and the rhetorics they are engaged with.

Gurak's (2001) version of paying attention is called cyberliteracy, a different kind of information intelligence than that based on print—it involves a critical consciousness of ways that information is controlled by power. Of course, readers must engage with print texts critically and thoughtfully, but Gurak argued that information intelligence is even more important in the context of accelerated "technological Darwinism" (her term for technological determinism), where most people assume that the trajectory of technological development simply follows the free market (i.e. the power of the consumer's power to purchase), ignoring the fact that technological dominance has much to do with how companies embrace and make decisions about technology (and market that technology to consumers). Such a relationship is not set in stone, as Gitelman (2003) pointed out in her discussion of how the phonograph was changed by

users from the dictation device it was designed as into the entertainment device it was coopted into. Still, it would seem that Gurak's vision of corporate agency is significant. Selfe (1998) and Hea (2009), both important techno-critics in this section, point out how the idealistic narratives of corporate and institutional implementation of technologies are a powerful ideological force in forming how educational technology is used in the classroom, and that it is the responsibility of writing scholars and teachers to attend to, interrogate, and even resist such narratives.

Perhaps the most apparent call to *pay attention*—and the call from which I have taken the phrase that so motivates this dissertation—is from Cynthia Selfe's *Technology and Literacy in the Twenty-First Century: The Importance of Paying Attention* (1999). Though more than ten years old, Selfe's examination of "a belief system [which] masks some very real effects of technological literacy from our national consciousness" is still relevant (p. xxi). She argued that literacy instruction is and always has been linked to technology, and that incomplete understandings of technology and technological literacy limit instruction as well as our social narratives about that instruction. Paying "critical attention to the issues generated by technology use" is central to the work of literacy educators, who far too often, Selfe argues, take up an official version of technological literacy that comes from government and industry, usually along simplified narratives of technology-as-boon and technology-as-bane. One part of her rhetorical analysis pointed out that language in education standards demonstrates a "commonsense

connection" between technological literacy and economic prosperity, so commonsense that is generally unexamined:

> In part, the link between technology and literacy has proved so potent a cultural formation because it draws from a wellspring of modernist belief in science as a progressive force in society, a belief that characterizes Western thinking in general. In addition, when this belief system is articulated with other belief systems that are peculiarly American, the potency of the technology-literacy link is amplified and focused in ways that make it especially powerful and influential. (p. 115)

In such a system, debate and critique seem ridiculous: some literacy educators resist or avoid technology, leaving it out of their teaching and remaining absent from technology decision-making, while technology advocates can often be dangerously uncritically enthusiastic. In either case, the connection is not carefully explored.

Haas (1996) called technology the "central, defining fact" of 20th century literacy, indeed all of literacy itself (p. 205). *Writing Technology* was an attempt to historicize current literacy technologies in order to understand them more fully. Such historicization helps scholars and teachers resist oversimplifying literacy technologies, which "provides a countermove to the cultural dominant of transparent technology" as well as a critique of determinism (p. 206). Her rhetorical analysis points out that the "computer revolution" arguments that typify writing about computers in English are often confused in their philosophies of technology. When scholars place technology within a cycle of historical revolution by working with historical analogies between computers and printing presses , for example, they end up featuring technology as an agent

of change, instead of persons or cultures. Thus they frame technology as driving culture, and humanists must either catch up or get out of the way. The result, for Haas, is that the role of scholars and teachers in the humanities is minimized. Technology marches on without the input, design, and implementation of the humanities. Thus, for Haas, a "remaking of the language of technology" is a "critical" part of technology and literacy studies (p. 199).

In her discussion of the "computer revolution" argument, Haas points out a series of problems: First of all, historical analogy is rarely an accurate reasoning tool, and generally obscures as much as reveals. Such arguments also vastly oversimplify the history of print as a quickly-spreading and fast-building revolution in the daily life of citizens. (Printed circulation, Haas argues, tended to conserve tradition rather than spread cultural change.) As well, these arguments assume that print and computers are separate and distinct phenomena, rather than being two parts of the same historical-material process, with computers multiplying and supporting the work of print, rather than usurping it. Computer literacy technologies are deeply dependent, in their very development, on the work and workings of older technologies in ways that we don't see and underestimate (alphabets, margins, directionality—all, Haas says, have been taken as granted). Such arguments also problematically see technology as self-determining, rather than developed "by purposeful human action in complex cultural settings" (p. 215), and tend to level or obfuscate the role of human agency.

Part of Haas' concern with remaking the language of technology is a concern with the location and tenor of such discourse. Along with a tendency for uncritical enthusiasm, she argues that technology discourse in English is closed, overspecialized, and often removed from mainstream or flagship journals—a point that I have also cited from Porter a number of times in this text. Though much research and good argument has been done, it has been increasingly Balkanized into subdiscipline status. If professionals in composition and rhetoric fail to take part in these conversations—for whatever reason—they undermine their own agency in institutions and a culture that are increasingly technologized.

Inquiry and technology in composition and rhetoric

Through a review of selected relevant literature, this chapter makes the case that technology discourse in composition and rhetoric is often removed from mainstream or flagship journals and theoretically distant from the apex technology discourses of *Computers and Composition* or the work presented at annual conferences like *Computers & Writing*. These, along with the pages of *CCC* and the outputs of CCCCs are only singular versions or faces of composition and rhetoric. The roll of individuals who have published in the pages of *College Composition and Communication*, for example, is a very small percentage of the participants in the larger discipline. There are other slices to take into account in order to get a fuller picture. The question then remains: how can researchers make meaningful (if not generalizable, then usefully localized) sense of or

statements about disciplinary ideology of the various constituencies making up composition and rhetoric? Not only that lump sum of teachers and writers often called practitioners, but also the group of scholars whose work is presented rather than formally printed, and certainly the growing body of writing program administrators—a group that the composition Ph.D. is often specifically intended to develop? That is the question that the next chapters take up, a question which the themes I have described here (technological optimism, critique, and determinism) will help answer.

CHAPTER III

CRITICAL RHETORICAL CRITICISM

> Methodologies are technologies for seeing,
> and they, like all organic and prosthetic eyes,
> filter and construct realities and knowledge.
> (DePew, 2007, p. 68)

In Chapter 2, I reviewed literature in composition and rhetoric in order to establish a disciplinary understanding of digital writing and a set of disciplinary lines of argument and commonplaces from the apex discourse of scholarship. In this chapter, I turn to a different part of the field in order to sort out operative *doxa* in that community. To do so, I work from the method/orientation of critical rhetoric (McKerrow 2010a), a version of ideological rhetorical analysis that draws on the theories of Michel Foucault to enact critiques of domination in hegemonic discourse, offering "critiques of prevailing power/knowledge systems" (Cooper, 1997, p. 104). I assess my position as a rhetorical critic/analyst and ethical considerations related to that position, the rhetorical nature of research design and methodology, which is my approach to rhetorical analysis and the study's focus on *doxa*.

Positioning the critic

In Chapter 1, I described the WPA-L as a space for disciplinary discourse. Often described as a major semipublic forum for the field (Krause 2012; Rice 2006; Schirmer 2009), the WPA-L is a rich site for non-scholarly professional discourse that treats the same material as is treated in academic publications, but

in a more immediate and less formal manner. It is an important knowledge site for composition and rhetoric, where faculty from different types of universities, different sizes and styles of writing programs, and different geographic locales go to ask questions, share opinions, build community, and collect feedback on various disciplinary activities—research, teaching, administration, community involvement, and an array of other concerns. Not tied to the Council of Writing Program Administrators national association, journal, or conference in any official capacity, the WPA-L is nevertheless an important piece of the WPA community. WPA is both professional association and administrative acronym , a common identification embraced within the larger community of composition studies. Gunner calls the WPA the "conventionalized structure" of the field of composition (p. 19), while Dobrin notes that this identity is pervasive in the composition studies "gestalt" (2011a, p. 94). Composition and rhetoric doctoral students take WPA preparation courses and professional development sessions in Ph.D. programs as well as at national conferences. The WPA-L is not equivocal to the WPA or all wpas, but the WPA-L is certainly connected to WPA mindset.

Briefly, I turn to my own experiences with and position to the LISTSERV text, as the perspectives I bring to it influence my analysis. Such a discussion cannot eliminate subjectivity in the study, but it can account for it, both for the purpose of reminding myself of my own ethical responsibility to the text and making myself publicly accountable for the audience of this research. Thus, I

briefly describe my relationship with the WPA-L before describing my role as rhetorical critic from a methodological perspective.

I am certain that I would not be alone in noting that as a student the WPA-L played some role in my introduction to the wider field of composition and rhetoric, and my own identifications as a new writing teacher and scholar. The chairman of my Master's thesis and first mentor as a composition instructor, Randall Popken, taught a "Studies in the Teaching of Composition" course; in this course and others, he would exhort his students to join the WPA-L. According to his syllabi, this assignment was intended to cultivate our understanding of contemporary composition; a common course task included oral reports over two weeks' worth of WPA-L discussions, which would be assigned right alongside oral summaries of recent *CCC* articles. Indeed, one participant on the "Happy Birthday WPA-L" thread (posted May 2011) cites a similar assignment to the one described above as part of their own more recent graduate studies, and seven others in the thread cite joining the WPA-L as significant steps in their education. Others cite the WPA-L as formative for "first job" experiences, too—the WPA-L seems to have some role in helping young professionals survive their first rites of passage, as the participants themselves narrate it, along with a general understanding of the list as an "epistemological activity" for composition as well its nature as casual conversation (Yancey, 2003, p. 113). Knowledge there is not simply passed along, but created in the cumulative interaction of its participants. One of my graduate school colleagues who now holds her Ph.D. in rhetoric and

teaching composition and technical writing, likes to joke that she considers the moment she finally "made it" in the field to be the day she was personally and publically reprimanded by Ed White on a WPA-L thread. The WPA-L is an important agency site for teachers and scholars of writers of all stripes and a "common area" for the field. My own participation on the WPA-L has most often been as a reader (or perhaps a lurker) rather than a contributor, using the archives as a place to find resources and gather information on the issues I deal with in my own position and department. Thus I participate in the goals and actions of the community and the form of agency that it offers—as the majority of subscribers to the list do—as a watcher that enacts the influence of the WPA-L in his own institutional sphere, rather than a writer that works out the WPA-L ideology on the list itself at any particular moment.

Another piece of my understanding of the WPA-L, one that colors this analysis, is a common perception of that community by more techno-centric members of the larger composition community. These individuals (who I have interacted with in graduate classes and professional development seminars, seen and heard at academic conferences, or read and interacted with through various social media and blogs) often cite the WPA-L as being more than a little backwards-looking when it comes to computers and digital writing. Some lightheartedly joke about this characteristic, while others narrate their frustration, coming to a point where they feel compelled to unsubscribe from the list entirely. I share many of their sentiments at times, and indeed this analysis

has at times felt as if it were based on a sneaking assumption that the WPA-L, despite springing out of early e-mail lists in the field (such as Megabyte University), is often and ironically antitechnological. As I will point out, that assumption has indeed been strongly pushed back against. Thus my position as "critic" or analyst is complex, being in some ways from the inside as well as from the outside; this position, however, is a common one in a discipline that writes and studies itself as a scholarly pursuit as much as it has taken up its other objects of study. This study is rhetorical analysis and criticism, and does not claim to be ethnographic in nature.

The common identity of the rhetorical analyst is that of *critic*—the one who interprets and ultimately judges the experience of a text. In "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis," Raymie McKerrow's (2010a) figure of the critic is an inventor that collects and organizes otherwise fragmented messages: "the task is to construct addresses out of the fabric of mediated experience prior to passing judgment on what those addresses might tell us about our social world" (p. 106). The critic-as-inventor pulls together "disparate scraps of discourse which, when constructed as argument or—in the case of this study—as description, serve to illuminate otherwise hidden or taken for granted social practices" (2010a, p. 106). Critical rhetoric and other methods of rhetorical analysis are fundamentally messy, creating a particular *version* of a text that is already someone else's version of reality. Thus, the critic-researcher's agency and ethical choices are worth significant consideration.

Maurice Charland's challenge to McKerrow's critical rhetoric is essentially that it offers "no telos except for constant critique" (1991, p. 72); it is suspicious rather than productive. In order to extend McKerrow's program beyond the sometimes purely negative activity of critique, Charland argues for the importance of *phronesis*, a "hermeneutic moment" that goes beyond seeing what's wrong and attempts to imagine the good (p. 73). According to Charland, the inventor-critic must be the *bricoleur*, the cultural tinkerer who disassembles things to try out new constructions, rather than the *guerilla*, constantly undermining any and all power foundations. Prudence should be his fundamental characteristic; the prudent critic tries to imagine "good" in his hermeneutics, rather than approaching texts agonistically. Jim Kuypers notes that "the very act of fashioning a text imbricates the critic as both interpreter and agent of social change" (1996, p. 455) Thus, rhetorical critics must "engage the particular with the general good in mind" (p. 457). This means that not only should the critic engage in positive critique that intends some practical result as its goal, but also that they interpret ethically and reasonably. In one sense, it is the critic himself who determines prudence and defines the good and the ethical, certainly a modernist, authoritative construction. Reflexivity and recognition of a rhetorical responsibility—not only to one's subject, but also to one's audiences—must also be an important part of the critic's ethos.

Often, critical rhetorical analysis is turned toward texts and situations in which there is ideological strife or political conflict, situations in which social

change is needed, such as Discenna's (2010) analysis of the Yale union strikes, in which she critiqued the historical construction of graduate student labor in the university. In cases like these, rhetorical criticism can be pragmatically turned toward a productive, ethical end, advocating for situations and rhetorics that might empower the disempowered or call problematic ideological positions into question. Critical rhetoric can help people. In this study, the texts I am analyzing and the questions I am asking, don't involve domination and power on that scale. I work with critical rhetorical analysis in this case because I am interested in its attention to ideology and community knowledge, rather than because I am attempting to create a philosophical accountability system for WPA-L users. Their philosophies of technology, after all, aren't really something I need to worry about holding them accountable for. Still, imagining the good and working from an ethical perspective are an important part of this analysis; I define imagining the good as beginning with a listening stance toward those participants whose words I purport to interpret. In this study, the good and the ethical include my attempts to approach the corpus non-agonistically, or at least to mitigate agonism or bias by offering transparency about coding and my own perspectives or motivations as a researcher. Another characteristic activity of the prudent critic is reflection. In order to keep from simply constructing an attack on this corpus, as a critic I must interpret and without accusing, allow the WPA-L writers to speak for themselves as much as possible by relying on descriptive analytical methods and rich quotation, and provide the readers enough information about

my own perspectives along with coding, analytical and interpretive processes that they may judge those steps for themselves.

As Thomas Huckin notes in "Context-Sensitive Text Analysis" (1992), text analysis (of many kinds) offers "plausible interpretation" (p. 89) rather than an empirically managed interpretation of reality; it provides evidence for a point of view on texts and those who create them. It demands rhetoric, an argument for why the interpretation is rigorous. Since the fundamental goal of this study is to eavesdrop (Ratcliffe, 2005) on composition and rhetoric as it is enacted on WPA-L to get a sense of what is believed about technology and digital writing (or at least how those beliefs are expressed in specific sites), an ideology-focused rhetorical analysis that is open to mess and revision seems to be the most appropriate method of creating what is ideally a reliable statement about the technorhetoric of composition as enacted by the WPA-L during the time of my analysis. Scholars have pointed out that reliability in this kind of analysis is contingent rather than purely empirical, dependent to a greater extent upon the critic's ethos and the level to which they unfold their methods and rationale (Blythe, 2007; Grant-Davie, 1992).

Michelle Sidler (2007) has noted that "the Web and other technologies flatten discursive spaces, making them accessible to mainstream and nonmainstream scientists alike" (p. 73); researchers can scavenge all sorts of discourse from online communities, text that sometimes sits right across the line between personal and private (Banks & Eble, 2007; Sidler, 2007). Online

environments complicate the idea of privacy of documents; researchers must consider if their online text-based study intrudes on the participant's expectation of privacy and the personal implications of online texts, drawing on "deep knowledge of the community's intentions" (Sidler, 2007, p. 83) and prolonged, careful engagement with the community (Rickly, 2007, p. 391). In this case, I recognize that texts I have analyzed are publicly archived and thus accessible to anyone. Even by stripping data sets and quotations in the research report itself, I cannot certainly say that particular text is untraceable to particular individuals. However, the public archive (in some cases appearing in web crawler and search engine results) also means that these texts are public. There may indeed be some expectation of privacy. Who outside composition and rhetoric and related fields of work or study knows or cares about the WPA-L? On the other hand, reading the list itself requires no login or validation, and subscriptions are entirely open. The WPA-L is quite public, even if nobody sees it, and posters are often reminded on list that thousands of subscribers are potentially watching, a group that includes the very scholars and figures that sometimes come under discussion. In fact, this study's audience includes individuals who are quite literally participants in it, as they are contributing members of the WPA-L. As a kind of self-study, this dissertation participates in a disciplinary self-critical awareness that is common and cited as valuable in metadisciplinary research (Massey & Gebhardt, 2011).

Being both member and critic of the WPA-L, with a certain amount of bias on the technology question itself and because of my own inclinations and values

of teaching with technology, I must also rely carefully on some form of triangulation, helping mitigate my own biases so that they don't undermine rigorous interpretation. Collaborative measures such as using a second coder and rater are commonly accepted as a way of enhancing the rigor of empirical analyses, but as Stuart Blythe (2007) has pointed out, when coding and analyzing latent content (ideological content like *doxa*, for example), it becomes more difficult to measure reliability "because of the degree of interpretation" inherent in the process (p. 219). I considered this high degree of interpretation a strong limitation on using a second rater, especially considering the critic's position as *bricoleur*, a complex construction, and difficult to cultivate in another individual. Because of limitations of the dissertation process itself, including secondary corpuses for analysis[11] also proved to be larger than possible for the scope of this project. In this case, I relied on my own ethical positioning and reflection, on a very openly-described coding and analysis process, and on my attempt to work from a specifically prudent, descriptive stance rather than a negative, critical one. As well, an external data set from a recent Pew Internet and American Life Project study, *The Impact of Digital Tools on Student Writing and How Writing is Taught in School*s (Purcell, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2013), offered an important counterpoint to my analysis, as I discuss in Chapter 6. These methods provide an

[11] My original research design included planned analyses of the *Research in Teaching English* annual annotated bibliography, CCCC program abstracts. I had also considered selecting other years and messages from the WPA-L; these have all been reserved for future research.

important opportunity for the audience to examine the "absences" of what my research will have produced (DePew, 2007, p. 66).

Finally, I tried to offer a prudent reading; one that avoided trying to vilify groups in the conversation and that instead engaged in a self-reflexive critique of freedom. Such a reading recognizes that an objective stance is impossible and undesirable, but that critics might reach a "stance of innocence" by "vibrat[ing] what they see in the text against their own expectations and predilections" (Leff, 1980, p. 344). Again, a sense of *phronesis* provides a way for the critic to be ethical without resorting to modernist moral generalizations; as Jim A. Kuypers noted: "what is good is viewed in terms of human commitment and is time bound" (1996, p. 457).

This project examines the ideology embodied in utterances and appeals in the discourse and shares Ratcliffe's (2005) goal for rhetorical listening: that of "conscious identification." Ratcliffe notes that by eavesdropping, approaching discourses emically, and proceeding within an accountability logic, we can "analyze claims and cultural logics" in order to "[revise] identifications troubled by history, uneven power dynamics, and ignorance; as such, [conscious identifications] may foster cross-cultural communication on any topic" (p. 19). The goal of this study is not to criminalize or deify WPA-L participants or the discipline at large, but rather to examine how technology is talked about, thought about, and ultimately represented in the WPA-L community as reflected in this sample.

Theorizing rhetorical methodology

Broadly, this dissertation describes commonplace assumptions and ideologies surrounding the use of technology in the WPA-L community using a carefully-considered rhetorical analysis of texts from the LISTSERV. "Carefully-considered" is an important, elusive term, demanding a more thorough consideration of the rhetoricity of research and the way that research choices speak to one another.

In "Lost in the Translation," Clay Spinuzzi (2005) has claimed that research is rhetorical, that techniques, methods, and methodologies are and must be adaptable to particular needs, problems, and situations. Composition research (and with it technical communication) is a case study in the rhetorical nature of inquiry. It would be easy to oversimplify this point—there is, of course, no one method in writing research, and the array of techniques and theories presented in different edited collections about method helps to make the beginning of a case that researchers must carefully arrive at their method in order to answer their questions. However, composition and rhetoric's multiplicity of methods still allows room for the idea that method can be chosen and applied by researchers; pulled from a tool box at the researcher's whim. Even though methods are in one sense measuring instruments, those instruments bring with them entire worldviews. To borrow the cliché just this once, a hammer sees everything as a nail, and neo-Aristotelian rhetorical analysis sees everything as deliberative, forensic, or epideictic. John Law (2004) argued at length that method produces

arrangements: particular realities with political implications that obscure just as they reveal (p. 143). It is impingent on the researcher to design research out of particular contexts and for particular audiences, and to see method as an emergent and flexible response to phenomena with its own implicit dialectic with the world. A research task that is carefully planned, open to change, and reflective is a long step toward one that can be called rhetorical.

Patricia Sullivan and James Porter (2004), in "On Theory, Practice, and Method," have made the classic case for a rhetorical understanding of research, what they call "problematized method" (p. 311), or research as *praxis*, the researcher's motion between theory and practice rather than privileging one over the other. As Sullivan and Porter note, theory refers to the critical stance or interpretive/methodological ideas the researcher brings with them. Practice refers to situated activities that researchers purport to study and influence through their work. Both are ways of knowing, and neither can fully account for the other. One cannot observe without theory, even in the most emic of approaches; and evidence from practice is of limited use on a wider scale without critical judgment or orientations from which phenomena can be abstracted (p. 304). Sullivan and Porter offered *praxis* as a more enabling and dynamic concept—a middle ground that is "a higher form of practice" (p. 304). It focuses on the local, but is informed by the general, and enhanced by *phronesis*, prudential reasoning. Sullivan and Porter have framed *praxis* as a kind of conceptual (rather than simply multimodal) triangulation, one "willing to critique

both theory and practice by placing both in dialectical tension, which can then allow either to change" (p. 305). Methodological structure becomes a heuristic, helping researchers begin looking, but it is not static; *praxis* researchers remain open to emergent changes and are willing to critique theory just as much as they might wish to revise practice. Questions change as methodologies shift, and methods shift as particular research situations unfold. Thus flexibility and *phronesis* allow researchers to tell multi-sided, even alternating stories about practices (p. 304).

A *praxis* orientation to methodology is an elaborate paradigm for research, but a helpful one for understanding rhetorical analysis, a method that can be especially rhetorical and adaptable in nature.

Constructing critical rhetorical analysis

Rhetorical analysis is a common method for exploring the dynamics of texts, especially exploring "what texts do and how texts mean" (Bazerman & Prior, 2004, p. 3). Beyond that, however, there is no single, generally accepted definition of rhetorical analysis (Selzer, 2004). Rather, there are multiple methods or approaches that researchers can draw from as they build their critiques.; rhetorical analysis is an especially *rhetorical* method. In particular, this dissertation uses the theoretical program of critical rhetorical analysis, as theorized by McKerrow (2010a) and extended by other scholars, and the structure and goals of an ideographic method (McGee, 1980) to analyze and

characterize *doxa* related to my research questions. Such a rhetorical analysis attempts to "identify and constitute the 'rhetorical' features of discursive artifacts" (Farrell, 1980, p. 303) in order to "group and synthesize related shards and fragments of discourse" (p. 311).

"Method" is a difficult term for critical rhetorical analysis. Critical rhetoric is a diverse and fragmented approach to symbolic texts, without a singular program for its methodology. An eclectic approach is, as Laura Gurak noted, particularly appropriate to online communication's hyper-everything pace and structure (2001, p. 161). The structures and procedures of criticism (or its "method") are something continually constructed and reconstructed by the critic in conversation with their chosen artifact; the interpretive logos of critical rhetoric (its "-ology") is provided by the orienting framework of critical theory. Since there is no central methodology that critical scholars can turn to, characteristics of the object of criticism and the critic's goals provide the possibility for helpfully emic (open and responsive to the text) and usefully etic (mindful of previous theory) approaches to critique (Black, 1980; Blythe, 2007).

The difficulties of examining an e-mail LISTSERV through rhetorical and textual analysis are profound. Mary Sue MacNealy (1999) noted that text analysis must examine materials "produced in natural settings" (p. 124) and ought to proceed by "systematic methods of study, including empirical techniques" (p. 124). As a number of scholars have remarked, there is no one *right* way to proceed beyond a few generic recursive stages (Blythe, 2007; Huckin, 1992,

2004). At the same time, the online writing situation is so complex that it "exceeds our capacity to know" (Rickly, 2007, p. 381); there is nothing easily systematizable about this kind of digital text in its natural setting.

The LISTSERV is certainly natural discourse produced for particular audiences and purposes, but its sheer volume, multivocality, multithreadedness, mixture of synchronous and asynchronous delivery, irregularity of form, variety of content, and changes in reader- and writership over time provide difficulties for traditional approaches to rhetorical analysis and conceptualizations of the mailing list as a stable text. A pilot study for this dissertation experimented with various approaches to rhetorical analysis (metaphor criticism, narrative criticism, Burkean analysis, neo-Aristotelian criticism) and showed the limitations of each method in being able to make sense of a LISTSERV text. Often, these are structural limitations. Neo-Aristotelian criticism relies on particular genres, stylistic devices, or logical structures, can't account for dialogue; narrative criticism can't theorize about non-narrative discourse. Critical rhetorical analysis, an approach described by McKerrow (2010a) in "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis," proved to be a useful method of interpreting this kind of highly fragmented discourse for ideological features. In one sense, the fragmented nature of LISTSERV discourse demanded this framework in that it disallowed others. Critical rhetoric is open to a wider array of "what scholars should focus on or call rhetorical" (p. 198), and has been used as an approach to texts as diverse as postcards and episodes of *Oprah*. As well, the critical

rhetorician is often described as constructing texts out of cultural fragments rather than describing singular texts. This activity makes a great deal of sense for studying a LISTSERV.

Principles of critical praxis

McKerrow did not call critical rhetoric specifically a method, and so unsurprisingly, specific methodological discussions are rare in studies working inside the framework of critical rhetoric (indeed, such discussions are not common in rhetorical criticism in general). Most critics will discuss their rationale for choice of texts, but methodological formulations beyond that are rare. Rather than outlining immutable principles or aiming his program at specific discourse features, critical rhetoric operates as a heuristic, explicitly an "orientation" (2010a, p. 105) to rhetorical texts. It is not a discrete theoretical framework with particular analytical moves (like dramatistic analysis has often, if wrongly, become). McKerrow has described critical rhetoric instead in terms of eight orienting principles:

1. The first principle of praxis for critical rhetoric, as I have already identified, is understanding that it is not a method in the sense of a set of systematic behaviors and principles, but instead a practice (a point McKerrow develops from McGee, 1984). In much the same way as Sullivan and Porter (2004) argued in their discussion of research as *praxis*, for McKerrow, "creative insight is constrained by systematicity of method" (2010a, p. 107). Taking

Kenneth Burke as his primary example of the worthy "unmethodological critic" (p. 107), McKerrow's critical practice is to a great extent based on the critic's agency over their method, as this agency allows for the creativity, insight, and attention needed to turn description into understanding and evaluation. The program of critical rhetoric puts a great deal of trust in the researcher's ethical stance and ability to be reflexive rather than dogmatic, a point that other critics have extended on (Ceccarelli, 1998; Charland, 1991; Cyphert, 2001; Discenna, 2010; Hariman, 1991; Kuypers, 1996; McKerrow, 2010b). Critical rhetoric's rejection of prescriptivism requires a great deal of reflexivity and openness to change on the analyst's part, which is one reason why that sort of reflection begins this chapter and is present in other parts of this dissertation. For McKerrow, as for McGee, there can be only the broadest of conceptual to-do lists for the critical rhetorician. Though my own manifestation of critical rhetoric frames much of the analysis empirically, much of the coding and analysis is based on my own attention and understanding of the corpus as a researcher rather than a large preexisting set of categories for attention.

2. Another of McKerrow's orienting points is a focus on materiality: "Ideology exists in and through the language which constitutes it (McGee in McKerrow, 2010a, p. 107). Discourse is an agency, a tool, a thing through which social relations and domination are reinforced. Systems of discourse, or what Burke might have called terministic screens, are determinative and controlling. Agents can interact and do have the ability to alter discourse and its power, but

they also participate "in terms of that grid's determinative nature" (p. 107)—they cannot participate in discourse from an unideological place. Agents are constituted by language, and gain agency by becoming aware of that constitution; agents participate in ideology through the language they use, create, and react to, which is itself an incorporation of social power and systems. From this perspective, agents who do not enter into dialectical relation with ideology cease to be agents, making this orienting point of praxis an important motivator for critics to participate in a critical rhetoric. Part of this study's motive is to work toward this interrogation—to look at the WPA-L's incorporation of its own terminological screens in its discourse, and in doing so entering into that dialectic and, ideally, helping the community to retain its agency in relation to technology (something it strongly claims, as parts of the next chapters discuss).

3. Rhetoric constitutes doxastic as well as epistemic knowledge; McKerrow's argument is that critical rhetoric must be "grounded on a reconstitution of the concept of *doxa*" (p 108). The long history of rhetoric's subordination into reason needs little coverage here; working from Hariman (1986) and Bourdieu (1977, 1979), McKerrow claimed that critics working from the understanding of rhetoric as epistemic continue Plato's vilification of it; critical rhetoricians must take a more affirmative approach (Muckelbauer, 2008), reasserting or rehabilitating *doxa* as competing undiscussed truths rather than the simple notion of "falsity" implied in Plato's celebration of truth and certainty.

4. The fourth orienting principle posits the power of naming and description: "naming is the central symbolic act of a nominalist rhetoric" (McKerrow, 2010a, p. 110). Naming has power to justify, create, and affect perception, and subjects are changed as labels change. This principle applies just as well to the analyzed text as it does to the act of analysis itself; naming is contextual and changing, coming out of kairotic moments. Nominalism is a practice of both text and critic. The WPA-L texts I analyzed name and deploy ideology as participants determine and redetermine the phenomena they discuss. At the same time, the critic in the act of criticism also engages in an act of naming power as he constructs the text by focusing on and calling attention to particular elements rather than others. Naming—one example is qualitative coding—is interpretive, and it is an inherently rhetorical process. In the context of other principles, it is a process that often obscured in research reporting, usually in the name of page limits.

5. McKerrow's fifth principle is that "influence is not causality" (p. 111). Symbols (discourse) have power to impact others, but the relationship cannot be reduced to causality. There is no simple structural or deterministic set of clearly-drawn causal lines, but discourse, and with it criticism, does have the power to influence the world. The task of the critical rhetoric is to call attention to myth, and invent discourse that "bridges the gap between a lived practice and a non-corresponding ideology" and thus helps provide the impetus for change (p. 112).

6. McKerrow's sixth principle is that "absence is as important as presence in understanding and evaluating symbolic action" (p. 112). Though much of ideology exists in what is named, what is disallowed and not said is just important in a critical rhetorical analysis. In one sense, this principle of looking for absence is exemplified in the analysis of sometimes-hidden *doxa*, the construct of interest in this study.

7. The seventh principle is that "fragments contain the potential for polysemic rather than monosemic interpretation" (p. 112), and this claim is where a great deal of the power of the critic comes from, as their polysemic critique uncovers a subordinate or secondary readings of a text, not only containing, but inducing growth in the "the seeds of subversion" (p. 113). There is always a multitude of things going on in a text; ideology is not monolithic, and the critic looks for multiple readings and multiple answers within the language of a rhetorical text.

8. Finally, for critical rhetoric, criticism is an activity or performance. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, when McKerrow has been criticized and extended by other rhetorical scholars, these critics often rely on the concept of *phronesis*. Criticism is not simply a method for disinterested inquiry, but an important way of working inside and against institutions. The critic empowers individual statements and advocates for an interpretation of those fragments, publicizing those fragments in a way that is responsible and invites productive change.

Though not universally agreed upon by critics, these are the basic set of explicit *doxa*, or 'givens' that McKerrow presents for the critic to use as theoretical anchors as they examine discourse. Again, critical rhetoric is less a method and more a set of motivations, made specific in the principles of critical practice. These are theoretical frames by which a text can be explored and the goals that the critic has in that exploration. In practice, critics tend to emphasize one or more of these concepts to a greater extent in their analyses, along with accompanying theoretical constructs such as "public sphere" or "*techne*" or "whiteness" or "vernacular." If method is analogous to an instrument, then the challenge of critical rhetorical analysis is that it is an instrument the researcher must to customize as he works—the researcher chooses particular focal points as he notices problems or behaviors in the text he is analyzing. An elision of a particular social group might lead one to focus on *absence*, while problems of terminology might lead another to focus on *polysemity*. Assumptions and *doxa*, in the case of this analysis, become significantly more important than nominalism.

Doxa

Because I am examining the material reflection of disciplinary assumptions in order to construct an analysis that interrogates those assumptions as they appear in a specific selection of WPA-L texts, this dissertation relies in particular on the concept of *doxa* as the construct of interest. Most basically described as the competing truths allowed and promulgated by

rhetorical texts, McKerrow (2010a) argued that *doxa* are typified by concealment, a kind of hidden knowledge that controls distribution of symbols and power (p. 109). In "The Pedagogical Missions of Professional and Technical Communication Programs," Jay Gordon (2009) called *doxa* "beliefs that are popular, but unspoken or unexamined" (p. 115). *Doxa* have to do with basic structures of rationality (what seems reasonable to anyone, the *topoi koinoi* of Aristotle) and cultural rationality (what seems reasonable to anyone in a specific cultural framework). Writing of Chaim Perelman's (1969) *Treatise on Argumentation* and with obvious connections to Burke, Booth, and a litany of other rhetoricians, Amossy (2002) has reminded us that there is no persuasion or social life without shared opinions and that *doxa* has a constructive, constitutive function in discourse, rather than a simply insidious one. *Doxa* is "the foundation of rationality in social life" (p. 469). Amossy's concern with *doxa* was a concern with how texts "use common knowledge and shared values" to "build an effective interaction" (p. 466). Doxastic discourse works from the assumptions, opinions, and knowledge of the reader: "by referring to a familiar script and […] a shared ethical code, the text reinforces the reader's adherence to a familiar representation" (p. 473). Amossy provides three basic categories of *doxa*: Rhetorical *topoi* are the structural relationships that seem "reasonable to any thinking being in the universal perspective privileged by Aristotle" (p. 474). Pragmatic *topoi* are "implicit propositions providing a link between utterances" (p. 480); coming from a background in poetics, Amossy works from continental philosophers to define

these, but rhetoric scholars might also refer to these as *warrants.* The third category, commonplaces or stereotypes, are "what is thought and believed in a given society at a particular time in the ideological perspective characteristic of contemporary criticism" (p. 474); these are shared beliefs and representations that have been "frozen" in their wide circulation (p. 482). According to Amossy, doxic elements can be analyzed at three levels: structural, implicit proposition, and explicit/implicit opinion and representation. These elements are useful for analysis, Amossy carefully pointed out, not simply because they represent dangerous ideological thinking, but because they work to allow interaction; they create common ground between readers and writers.

Haas' (1996) analysis, based on the perspective of Toulminian argumentation, was focused on the pragmatic, implicit proposition level of the warrant. Her analysis described specific implicit propositions binding together the claims and data in arguments about technology in English studies publications, and arrived at a catalogue of what she has called "ideological warrants," such as "technology is harmful" or "technology and humanities are distinct enterprises." This dissertation, however, is concerned with the level of commonly-accepted opinion within a group, whether explicit or implicit—Amossy's third category.

Doxastic knowledge is ideological knowledge that provides a conceptual thread by which to analyze statements in an artifact and also frames how the critique of domination or freedom might progress (McKerrow, 2010a, p. 96).

With its goal of sociopolitical exposé of "the discourse of power" that produces all types of texts (p. 103), critical rhetoric can make useful sense of diverse textual production. Most of all, ideological criticism provides a moral imperative for critics, which is an urge to see "the existence of powerful vested interests" manifested in texts (Wander, 1980, p. 92). Seeing and describing the *doxa* at work in the WPA-L at a particular moment in time (I studied a year's worth of technology-focused e-mail posts) provided an opportunity to get an idea about what the most powerful or pervasive ideas about technology were in that community for that period of time.

CHAPTER IV

CONSTRUCTING A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

> There is no single correct way of analyzing discourse.
> (MacNealy, 1999, p. 131)

In Chapter 3, I discussed the nature and goals of a critical rhetorical analysis. In this chapter, I describe my construction and performance of critical rhetorical analysis as a way to listen to what the WPA-L has to say in a systematic way. I discuss sampling and coding strategies and problems as well as methods for collecting and analyzing the complex WPA-L text, present an overview of the results of that analysis, and discuss the complex nature of LISTSERV messages and problems they present for analysis. Though the WPA-L's fragmentation and multiple speakers make it a complex text that resists straightforward analysis, the method I present here is designed to sort through noise to find coherent elements.

Establishing a corpus

This study's major corpus is drawn from the WPA-L stable archive through http://lists.asu.edu. The magnitude of text archived at that site presents no small problems for corpus selection. In its abundant scope and size, this text seems to resist the traditional rhetorical analysts' term "artifact." Because the WPA-L has been active for over 20 years—the list was started in 1991, and searchable archives are available online back to 1993—analyzing everything is not an option; management of the sample thus became incredibly vital to

reaching meaningful conclusions. This section describes how I arrived at my final corpus of 55 threads of 808 individual messages written by 263 different users, approximately 8.8% of all messages posted to the WPA-L in 2011, as a result of searches, creation of sample criterion, and preliminary coding.

For this study, I limited my corpus to threaded discussions on the subjects of digital writing, computers, and technology posted from January through December of 2011**.** This set of criteria allowed me to narrow in on and analyze a reasonably-sized body of texts that spoke directly to the research questions. The terms digital writing, computers, and technology are important central terms from my literature review, and provided the most meaningful and non-repeated search results. (Including "online" as a potential fourth search string provided no new results in preliminary archive searches). I chose 2011 for a number of reasons: one year is a convenient and significant slice to sample, and 2011 was the most recent completely archived year at the time I proposed this study; the high occurrence of the term "digital writing" in 2011 as compared to other years was also a part of my decision, ideally helping to build a purposively sampled corpus to analyze, a rise reflects a change in attention if not a change in perspective As evidenced in Table 4.1, 2005 would also have been a good year to construct a substantial corpus for this kind of study if I were using search term occurrence as the sole factor in my selection. Though I decided to rely on a more recent slice for this study, interesting results might result from a comparative analysis in the future.

The primary tool used to discover topically-relevant messages was the archive's search function; however, the brevity of that sentence belies the complexity of actually undertaking such a job. Table 4.1 provides a year-by-year comparison of results for my preliminary, exploratory set of search strings ("writing" is provided as a point of comparison only, and was not used as a search string for collecting my research sample).

Table 4.1 Matches for Relevant Search Strings on WPA-L by Year

	"digital writing"	*"digital"*	*"technology"*	*"computer"*	*"writing"*
1993	0	2	9	40	1258
1994	0	0	16	86	1301
1995	0	9	57	198	3039
1996	4	13	123	276	4658
1997	0	13	141	344	4713
1998	0	21	222	433	5311
1999	0	22	234	388	6052
2000	0	59	266	498	6719
2001	6	67	247	552	7323
2002	1	84	359	518	7408
2003	1	161	270	464	8797
2004	3	251	499	605	7526
2005	1	430	559	920	9700
2006	11	612	454	585	8094
2007	3	346	443	648	9321
2008	8	392	384	425	9151
2009	8	452	440	485	8445
2010	8	561	556	546	9452
2011	46	530	459	637	9092

Note: Retrieved July 26, 2012, July 27, 2012, and August 7, 2012 from http://lists.asu.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A0=WPA-L

Searching the string "technology" during 2011, for example, brings 459 individual matches; a percentage of these, however, occur in e-mail signatures, in job ads, in URLs, or in repeated calls for papers, and were eventually filtered out.

The content and format of search strings were another complicated issue. Take the following example search for the term "digital writing" in messages posted during 2006:

1. "digital writing" (quotes, not substring[12]): 11 matches
2. "Digital Writing" (quotes, not substring): 4 matches
3. digital writing (no quotes, not substring): 98 matches
4. digital writing (no quotes, substring): 103 matches (regardless of case)

The first and second search strings, because they were case-sensitive, returned results with no overlap. The third search string, on the other hand, found not only the complete phrase "digital writing" regardless of letter case, but also returned results of a "digital AND writing" search. That is, the third string brought results that just use the two words in the same message and not necessarily the phrase "digital writing." Although terminological purity is of interest because the study deals with explicit language, since the study is about *doxa* and ideology, which includes implicit, latent material, it would seem that looser searches would be more representative of the full corpus. Search operators and substring functionality were carefully recorded and are presented in Table 4.2. Rows in bold text are the search strings I relied upon to create this study's corpus.

[12] In default mode, searches on the archive only match full words, so searching for "tech" will not find messages containing the word "technology" unless those messages also contain the single word "tech." By selecting the "Substring" option (noted here and throughout at +s), the search matches any word containing the entered string. In this case, a substring search for tech would return not only "technology," "technical," and "technique," but also terms such as "biotech."

Table 4.2 Search Operators and Substrings

Search string used	*Substring search*	*Dates selected*	*Matches*
"digital writing"	-s	JAN 2011 until DEC 2011	46
"digital"	-s	JAN 2011 until DEC 2011	341
"digital"	+s	JAN 2011 until DEC 2011	443
digital	**+s**	**JAN 2011 until DEC 2011**	**559**
"technology"	-s	JAN 2011 until DEC 2011	459
"technology"	+s	JAN 2011 until DEC 2011	473
technology	**+s**	**JAN 2011 until DEC 2011**	**800**
"computer"	-s	JAN 2011 until DEC 2011	493
"computer"	+s	JAN 2011 until DEC 2011	637
computer	**+s**	**JAN 2011 until DEC 2011**	**707**
comput[a]	+s	JAN 2011 until DEC 2011	726

[a] Using the substring-enabled **comput** included a small number of hits like "computational" (i.e. computational linguistics and numeracy), but only added more of the same threads to the search results, so I returned to **computer.**

Arriving at a sample is an important process, the result of careful rhetorical decision-making, but in composition and technical communication, discussions of this research step are not only complicated by sampling terminology that varies from researcher to researcher, but are also often too brief to be helpful for those learning sampling techniques (Koerber & McMichael, 2008); there is even less published guidance or precedent for arriving at a cording corpus in situations like online forums (Grabill & Pigg, 2012). Researchers must think rhetorically and be sensitive to data saturation as they sample to build their corpus. In their study of identity performance in online forums, Jeffrey T. Grabill and Stacey Pigg developed a guideline of 15 or more comments and three unique participants as their minimum criteria for a thread to be worth analyzing, eventually analyzing only 20% of those in order to achieve "informational redundancy" (p. 106). Specifically, my own approach has been

designed to try to balance Grabill and Pigg's highly empirical analysis with the flexibly interpretive (he calls it "reasonable") method used by Gordon (2009, p. 117). In his analysis of pedagogical mission statements and beliefs about the value and purpose of writing or rhetorical instruction in technical communication journals and academic program websites, Gordon examined different public presentations of technical communication. His analysis of *doxa* involved "largely an interpretive process of identifying representative statements in the texts," and though it began with a complex and detailed coding scheme, his method became open-ended as he realized that the analysis he'd planned was "more fine-grained than necessary" (2009, p. 116). His sampling criteria (working from links listed on key technical communication professional sites) were developed specifically to balance the desire to analyze many sites with pragmatic manageability.

Because this study is not making claims about an empirically representative set of members of a larger group but only describing a particular community in a particular moment in time, advanced statistical sampling was unnecessary, and I focused on building a purposive sample. In this case, sampling and coding emerged in response to the mailing list itself as well as to my research questions, especially after determining the number of individual threads occurring on topics of interest as well as the number of messages and unique participants in specific threads.

In 2011, there were a total of 9,091 messages posted to WPA-L, in 2,148 different threads. Using the WPA-L online archives, I completed advanced searches for messages about digital writing, computers, and technology. As mentioned above, designing search strings to focus on the right aspects of these terms was complex. As I collected search results, I kept track of thread titles, total number of messages per thread, and the number of search matches per thread[13], ending with a total of 758 thread titles and their connected metadata; some of these search results were redundant. I also began a rough coding scheme to help me filter through my search results and reach a data set that a single researcher could reasonably *look at* (much less analyze) in a limited time. Many threads posted to WPA-L, for example, only involve a range of one to four messages because they are calls for papers, job announcements, survey requests, or other announcements. My first coding scheme was designed to help me cull these, and was developed as I sorted and classified threads with only one message:

- **Announcement**: An official announcement: awards, special publication of book or journal issue, updates on posted CFPs/jobs, advertisements for conference special sessions.
    - Does not include personal announcements or kudos.
    - Does not include announcements about a blog or website's publication of an article of interest.
- **Call**: A call for papers, chapters, proposals, or sessions; also a call for research study participants.

[13]That is, the number of different search hits from a single thread in each search, so a thread with 15 messages might have four matches in the search; this helped me determine how important the search term might be in separate threads at a glance.

- **Job**: a job or position announcement.
- **Survey**: A request for list users to participate in an online survey
- **NA/Signature**: A message that does not make claims about or discus technology, computers, or digital writing in more than one message in the thread. Many of these were due to e-mail signatures (a "Technology Coordinator" position title or faculty member at "Massachusetts Institute of Technology).

Most of the threads tagged **call**, **job**, or **survey**[14] were eventually filtered out because they met the low message criterion, but creating those codes helped me to develop that criterion in the first place. Working in Microsoft Excel, I combined my search results, scrubbed through them for repeated thread titles, and filtered out threads with four or fewer messages to work my way to a preliminary group of 198 threads. These I coded one last time with the above scheme, bringing me to a list of 61 threads. Many of the threads filtered through this step were tagged **NA/signature** and filtered away after an overview of the contents of the LISTSERV thread on the Internet. The set of 61 was culled to the final number of 55 threads[15] with a total of 808 individual messages written by 263 different users in later rounds of coding, about 8.8% of all messages in 2011 as a result of searches, criterion, and preliminary coding.

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[14] For the sake of clarity I follow Johnny Saldaña's (2013) advice to format the names of codes with bold font when they appear in my text.

[15] The threads in the Appendix are labeled with "primary document" numbers (a term from my analysis software, ATLAS.ti) from P1 to P59; some of the original documents I'd numbered were removed in this process, resulting in some skipped numbers. Despite the numbering scheme, the Appendix table includes 55 threads, not 59.

At this point, I downloaded messages from the 55 threads on the WPA-L archive into text documents for storage, stripped them of e-mail signatures, routing data, and most other identifying information, and finally imported them into ATLAS.ti for further rounds of coding and analysis (I describe the thread-user citation system I devised more fully in the introduction to Chapter 5). It is important to note before relating my analysis that much of the phenomena I analyzed and coded is limited to about half of the participants writing to the sampled threads. As shown in Table 4.3, 128 users posted only a single time in the entire sample. Most of the conversation, especially in contentious discussions, is carried by a small group of the list users; only twelve of the most active users were responsible for a large portion of the total conversation, posting 245 times, or 30% of all of the messages in the sample[16]. Table 4.3 shows a breakdown of frequency of users' posts, which roughly follows the 80-20 rule.

Table 4.3 Frequency of Users' Posts

Number of users (n=263)	***Frequency of posts to WPA-L***
4 (1%)	Posted > 30 times
8 (3%)	Posted 10-29 times
42 (16%)	Posted 4-9 times
81 (31%)	Posted 2-3 times
128 (49%)	Posted 1 time

[16] Of those 12, three are women and nine are men. The second most frequent poster is a woman, and of the three women, two have posts distributed across nine and five threads while the third only participates in two.

In one thread, a list administrator pointed out that there were at that time 3,117 subscribers to the list. The number of users that regularly posted during the study's date range was far, far lower, and most of the discussion occured among a relatively smaller group of users. A series of alternate visuals may help to illustrate this point. Figure 4.1 is a pie graph visualization of the user activity data presented in Table 4.3.

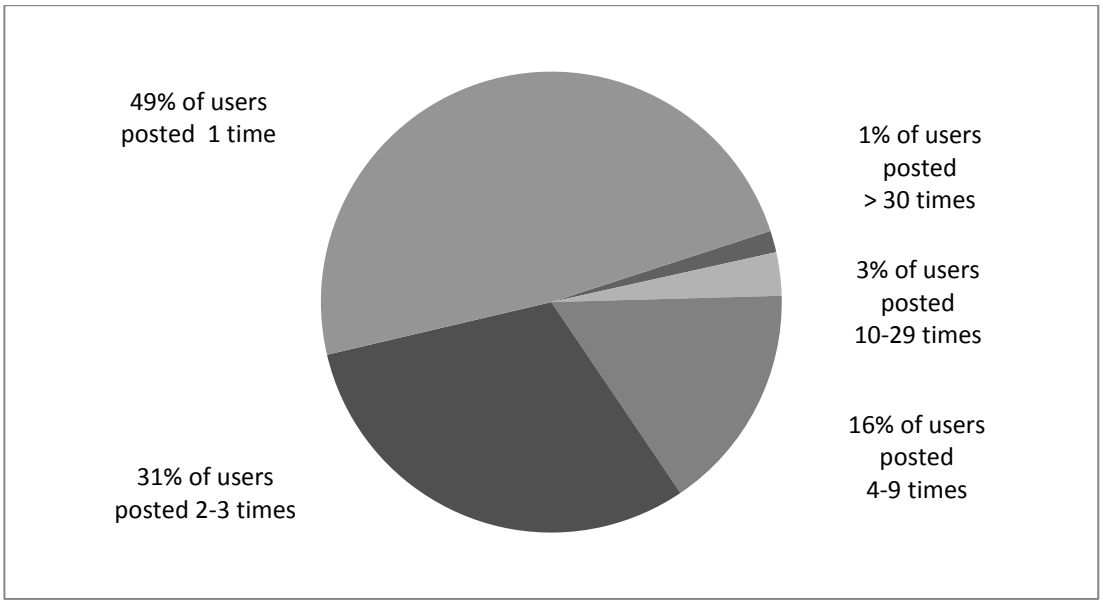

Figure 4.1 Percentage of Sampled Users' Frequency of Posts to Sampled Threads

Again, 49% of users only posted a single time in the sampled e-mails, while 1% of users posted more than 30 times in the sample. Figure 4.2 illustrates the entire group of reported subscribers to the WPA-L at the time of these e-mail discussions, including those that posted zero times to the sample (n=3,117). Ninety-two percent of the entire WPA-L group (defined here as subscription holders) didn't participate in these discussions by e-mailing the list.

Nonparticipation could have been the result of any of a number of factors: lack of interest in the topic, a desire to read and "lurk" rather than post to the list, fear of participating in a public forum, users being away from their inboxes, or even subscriptions that send to once-active but now-unused e-mail accounts.

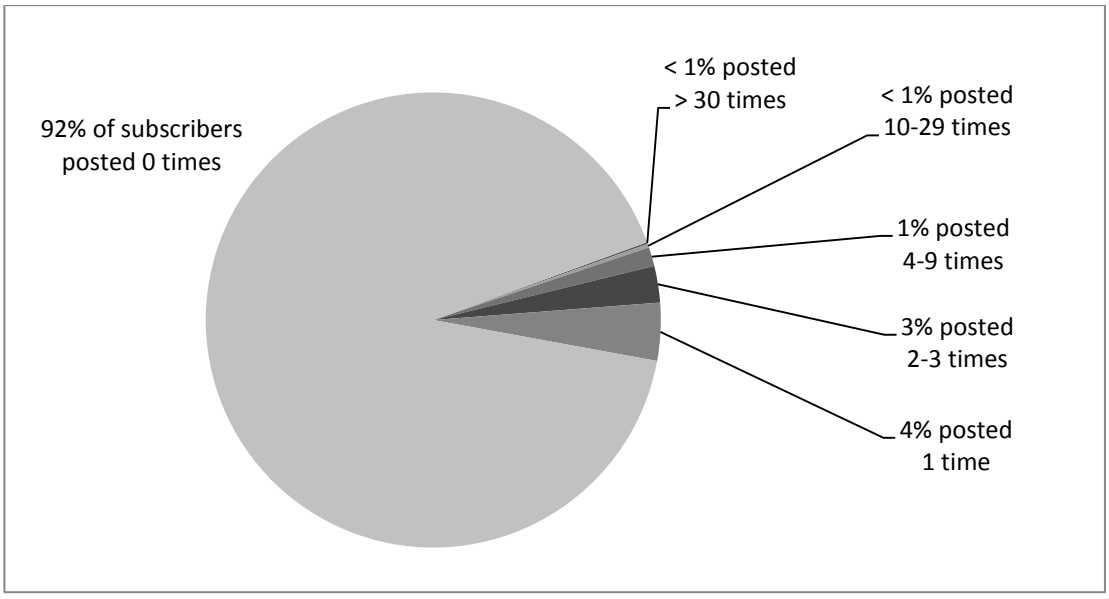

Figure 4.2 Percentage of WPA-L Subscribers Posting to Sampled Threads

There is a higher number of users that chose not to participate in these discussions than the number of those that did, and their silence could be interpreted in many ways (Glenn, 2004). On the other hand, making assumptions from these seemingly few messages is meaningful because of the high levels of importance that participants attribute to discussions that do occur, along with the practice of republishing "significant" list messages to sites like *CompFAQs*, a practice discussed in Chapter 5. Though not empirically a "community consciousness," there is clear evidence on the list itself that conversations on the

WPA-L are treated as such by those that listen to them. I revisit this issue and how it complicates my analysis and conclusions at the end of this chapter.

Establishing a coding scheme

One of the most significant interpretive steps in an analysis of text—especially when dealing with a large quantity data, as this study does—is analysis through division and classification. Coding is "the process of identifying units of analysis and classifying each unit according to the categories in a coding system—either a preexisting system or one developed for the data in question" (Grant-Davie, 1992, p. 272). Through coding, the researcher reads, simplifies, complicates, and ultimately imposes order on his data in order to view and draw conclusions about it. Although this assignment of salient, evocative, essence-capturing attributes to data is a critical link between data collection and explaining the meaning of that data, the process itself often goes untreated in journal publications. Thus, learning coding (and describing coding) presents a significant challenge for researchers learning this type of analysis. In his *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers,* Saldaña (2013) pointed out that there is no final authority or "best way" to analyze qualitative data; in a similar manner to Koerber and her discussion of sampling (2008), Saldaña noted the lack of thorough, exclusive focus on this specific topic in literature on research. Any approach to coding must be rhetorical and iterative (Saldaña used the term

pragmatic rather than rhetorical, but his explanation fits the term), and researchers must carefully design the right tool for their research job.

In his *Handbook*, Saldaña broke coding into two cycles. Careful first cycle coding and classification allows the researcher to own and thoroughly understand their data, while second cycle coding works through more pointed classification, prioritization, and synthesis. At any phase, coding is an interpretive act, one in which the researcher summarizes, distills, condenses, and ultimately imposes an order on data rather than simply reducing them (2008, p. 4). Coding is a form of invention through categorization: the researcher generates ideas by exploring connections between distinct, defined pieces of data in his attempt to solve the problem their data presents. Rather than simply listing and labeling data, linking is the fundamental creative act.

Though there are many variations and alternate classifications to methods of coding themselves (Saldaña described over 30 distinct qualitative coding methods in his *Handbook*), one simple way to categorize them is between etic methods and emic methods. In etic coding methods the researcher comes at their corpus from the top down, coding by an *a priori* list developed beforehand, coming out of central topics in a literature review, concepts in a theoretical framework, previous research, or pilot studies. (Saldaña specifically described one etic method he called provisional coding, but other specific methods could also be classified here.) Etic studies are valuable for illuminating general ideas, but as Black (1980) noted, rhetorical critics coming from an etic viewpoint are

"predisposed to find exactly what they expected to find" and run the risk of being "inhibited" in their analysis. Etic criticism is very good at confirming ideas—at the same time, it can be severely limited as a way of discovering new ones; one risk of a critical rhetoric is its status as an orientation. Because critical rhetoric is explicitly a theoretical perspective, it lends itself to finding what it looks for. In addition, my initial plan had been to work provisionally in the manner of a replication study, using a set of codes developed out of Haas' list of ideological warrants (1996), presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Haas' Ideological Warrants

Ideological Warrants	***Number of authors who used warrant***
Technology is an agent	9
Technology develops along a revolutionary model	4
Computer technology is unique	4
Communication technologies are historically analogous	4
Technology and humanistic studies are distinct enterprises	3
Technology is self-determining	3
Technology is harmful	2
Technology is important	2
Technology has positive and negative consequences/uses	2
New technology needs a new rhetoric	2
Technology is all the same	1
New technology is inherently superior	1
Technology is unresponsive	1
Technology is free-standing	1
Technology is culturally-embedded	1

Note: Adapted from Hass, C. (1996). *Writing technology*. New York: Routledge. (p. 93)

This scheme proved to be too specific and too etic for early rounds, before I had an adequate view of the particularities of my own corpus; it was more useful as I refined and began to categorize data after initial coding. Without a clear sense of the structure of discussion and claims participants were using in the WPA-L threads I collected, applying these ideas was impossible. After a few stalled attempts to use carefully predetermined *doxa* to code by, I decided to change to a more emic approach.

Emic coding methods are generally more open and descriptive (from Saldana's text, I include descriptive and *in vivo*[17] coding in my approach), coming at the text from a nominalistic perspective. Black describes emic viewpoints as approaching a rhetorical text "on its own terms, without conscious expectations drawn from any sources other than the [text] itself" (1980, p. 332). The emic critic attempts to "coax" their theory from the data rather than apply one[18], depending on "feedback" from the corpus itself (Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, & Papper, 2008, p. 396). After rejecting my provisional codes, I decided to approach coding from an eclectic perspective (Saldaña, 2013, p. 188), using a combination of descriptive and *in vivo* coding to create my initial set of codes. The results of these kinds of coding are by nature abundant, and thus provide an opportunity

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[17] To avoid confusion, I have italicized the term *in vivo*, which refers to the qualitative coding strategy of assigning labels to pieces of data using words or phrases as they appear in the data. I worked with the qualitative analysis software package ATLAS.ti, rather than NVivo.
[18] There are obvious connections to grounded theory in this approach.

for attention to many aspects of the corpus and enabled me to see these texts descriptively rather than solely through the lens of Haas' scheme and McKerrow's rhetoric. Though these strategies seemingly conflict with the goals of critical rhetorical analysis, I posit that using this descriptive, emic stance is a way to mitigate the potential for constant critique so inherent to the method. As *praxis*, such a method pushes back against theory to help me keep from seeing things entirely through the lens of the method and remain sensitive to the participants' own terms.

The first formal round of coding was completed by hand on paper printouts, relying on descriptive coding to summarize and construct categories of the various topics of each e-mail (for example, agency, online learning, machine grading, audience awareness, authorship, cognitive changes in student writers, corporations, and a human/machine line). These were combined into brief statements summarizing the content and direction of individual threads. I also initially coded for data such as types of evidence participants used (most commonly anecdotes, citations, hyperlinks, change narratives, and examples) and how threads were started (announcement, sharing a link/resource, sharing a link/resource with a claim, query, query with claim, query about use of a specific tool, follow-up from previous thread, change of subject line) (see Appendix).

Participants' most common way (26 of 55 threads) to begin a thread was by a broad query; for example:

> If I were given designated classrooms for all our writing classes, what should I put in them? I'm wondering what types of equipment, furniture, arrangement, etc. Thoughts? Advice? (p28 u_m16)

The next most common were queries about specific tools (eight threads):

> Does anyone have information about this [how to handle parenthetical citation from a Kindle book]? Much thanks. (p1 u_d14)

The third most common way of beginning a thread was a simple shared link or resource without an explicit claim (seven threads). For example, one thread opens with the participant sharing a link to a news item about the Purdue OWL without any comment or signature, which interestingly enough inspired one of the longer threads (33 messages). Another, much more contentious thread, also begins with a link shared without comment, reading simply:

> Lisa Lebduska in Inside Higher Ed today: http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2011/06/10/essay_on_the_negative_impact_of_facebook_on_student_writing. (p26 u_a07)[19]

On these topics, threads only rarely began with overt claims (four claims with queries, four claims with a shared link or resource). Argumentative discourse on the WPA-L certainly makes use of claims, but argument and deliberation generally emerges casually out of responses to implicit claims or tangentially out of a writer's response to some minor point mentioned by an author. In this network, discussion emerges most often out of requests for information or assistance.

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[19] Except where necessitated by clarity, I have retained the original spelling, grammar, and formatting of participants' WPA-L messages. Changes are enclosed by square brackets.

Along with descriptive coding, I included *in vivo* strategies to find and categorize the different central claims used by participants using the actual language of the data itself (for example, **good old days**, **new dogs old tricks**, **writing is technology**, or **need a better system**). Working through these two coding methods over a few rounds of coding, including entering my corpus and codes into qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti, I arrived at over 200 individual codes.

Over the next few iterations in ATLAS.ti, I refined my scheme, eventually coming to a list of just over fifty descriptive and *in vivo* codes that encapsulated the topics participants were making claims about. Many of these codes (for example, **change is good/bad**, **human-machine line**, and **tech is/not necessary**) include positions and claims on multiple sides of a topic. Both:

> Why would I want to write or teach anyone to write for a reader that isn't 'sentient'? (p10 u_p05)

And:

> And my point was simply that you're writing for several right now, depending on your word-processing software of choice and which sorts of accounts your e-mails are composed (or even end up in). (p10 u_d06)

were thus coded **human-machine line** at this stage. Classification in this manner allowed for a more condensed, high-level view of issues, and provided me an opportunity to see the array of claims on any one topic before further division (see Figure 4.3)

access	open/public
agency	privacy
audience awareness	science fiction/fantasy
authorship	student agency
calltochange	tech and panopticon/control
calltoparticipate	tech as apparatus/prosthesis (external)
capitalism/corporations	tech expertise
change	tech has pos/neg effects
change is good/bad	tech is agent
change narratives	tech is/not necessary
cognitive change/affect	tech is/not problem
comp/humanities is/not computing/tech	tech is/not scary
definitions of technology? definitions of writing?	tech is/not ubiquitous
digital divide	technologized writing spaces
digital native	technology is
ease/effectiveness/efficiency	terms
human-machine line	textbook companies
labor/outsourcing	theory of language
listservasknowledgespace	thinking/writing
media/techs are/not same	tools
medium is/not essential fundamental	use of new tech
naturalization	WPA and Tech
new rhetoric, new tech	WPA in field
new tech, new process/product	writing (literacy) is/not technology/ical
old rhetoric, new tech	writing is...
old timers stereotype	writing is/not universal (transcendent)
online learning	

Figure 4.3 Preliminary Descriptive/*in vivo* Codes

Some of the most common ideas I saw at this point in the coding were complex problems, like whether composition should attend to technological issues; arguments that have to do with ease, efficiency, and the teaching or learning of writing; problems of student, teacher, and computer agency; the line between humans and machines; and broad ideas about whether technology causes social, institutional, and behavioral problems.

Even with this condensed set of codes and close understanding of the contents of the 55 threads, I had yet to closely distinguish claims and, more importantly, the *doxa* or warrants operant among them. I returned to and expanded my provisional coding scheme, which contained definitions of what sorts of claims and *doxa* to code for and how to code them, definitions that enabled me to refine my analysis. As Blythe (2007) noted, coding for latent units that "require the coder to make an interpretation, to infer purpose" can be difficult (p. 215). The LISTSERV texts in question, like all online texts, resisted slapdash application and generation of theory (Grabill & Pigg, 2012, p. 100), so carefully defining what units are and how to determine whether phenomena are of interest or not was a crucial step. In the informal discourse of the WPA-L, messages didn't rely uniformly on academic argumentation strategies. As I found by analyzing the strategies users used to begin threads, dialogue and argument in these conversations was often (but not always) independent of a central claim in an opening thread, and because the list is an asynchronous medium, multiple conversations rapidly developed at the same time in the same discussion thread. Conversations developed organically, with arguments emerging through participants' tangents and off-hand comments. Participants often reiterated their claims a series of times in the same few paragraphs, multiple conversations might occurred at the same time in one thread (or even in one message), and tangential comments were often introduced to discussions.

To get at *doxa*, the assumptions behind claims, in a repetitive, fragmented, and often distracted text, I relied on the following criteria (adapted from Haas) to locate passages for further analysis:

1. Only code claims dealing directly with technology and technological discourse, containing key words or clear referents to related topics.
2. Disregard metadiscourse/forecasting.
3. If the same claim is repeated a number of times in the same e-mail message, use the most developed or detailed instance.

Each of these rules were applied on a message-by-message basis. If a new participant chimed in and brought up a similar point to another writer, the new participant's message was counted as a new main claim; if a participant who had already posted once in a thread returned to the discussion thread in a separate e-mail, that participant's new separate messages were counted as another new instance of the claim.

Types and amounts of *doxa*

From that point, I was prepared to work from my coded topics, claims, and other value statements and code for the ideological warrants behind them. Starting with my initial list of 15 provisional codes from Haas's study, I recoded the corpus, eventually developing a full list of 28 *doxa* for claims (see Table 4.5), distributed very unevenly among the threads.

Among the 808 messages analyzed, 26 different *doxa* appeared 474 times (two warrants from Haas' scheme were developed but did not appear in the sample), with a mean of 8.6 *doxa* per thread. Some threads were rich in

occurrences of claims and *doxa*, ranging from a high of 97 in one thread ("The Ideal Writing Environment"), or 64 in another ("Writing horseshoe-of-horse-heading-east Technology") to lows of 2 ("Some different questions about MLA interviews," "Online course evals," and "Visual Rhetoric") and in some cases 0 ("request," "National Day on Writing," "Textbook about blogging," and "Video lectures and distance ed in FYC). (The Appendix contains a complete list of threads.) This is not to say that these threads are devoid of ideology; only that these threads didn't contain main claims about technology as defined above and were not further analyzed.

Table 4.5 Frequency of *Doxa*

Doxa	***Overall Frequency***	***Threads (n=55)***	***Users (n=263)***
Technology is an external apparatus to writing	42	17	31
New technology demands a new rhetoric	40	18	33
Technology is an agent	37	14	22
Technology is not harmful	35	13	23
Students and teachers have personal agency with technology	31	15	23
Technology makes things easier, more efficient, more effective	29	12	25
Technology and composition (or humanistic studies) are not distinct enterprises	28	16	23
Students and teachers need personal agency with technology	27	14	16
Technology is harmful	25	13	16
Technology is important	20	10	13
Technology is ubiquitous	19	7	12
New technology can be conceptualized by old rhetoric	16	10	13
Technology has positive and negative effects	16	10	12
Technology is useful for observing, gathering, controlling, and assessing.	14	6	12
Writing is technology	14	4	6
Writing is a skill or practice generalizable beyond particular circumstances or contexts.	12	4	6
Technology is culturally embedded	11	8	10
Technologies are not all the same	11	5	8
Technologies are historically analogous	10	6	7
Technology is unresponsive	9	3	6
Old technology is superior	7	5	5
Technology develops on a revolutionary model	5	4	5
Writing is not technology	5	2	3
Technologies are all the same	3	3	3
Technology and composition (or humanistic studies) are distinct enterprises	2	2	2
New technology is superior	1	1	1
Technology is self-determining	0	0	0
Computer technology is unique	0	0	0

The second cycle of coding was more focused than the first cycle, searching for the most frequent or significant codes in order to develop the "most salient categories" for further analysis. In earlier stages of analysis, I identified 26 different doxastic views of technology and writing operating in the WPA-L, as illustrated in Table 4.5. (The final two in the table were retained from Haas' scheme, but did not appear in the sample for this study.)

As that figure shows, the two most common *doxa* by thread were **technology is an external apparatus to writing**, which was used 42 different times in 17 separate threads by 31 users. A significant number of users relied on the **new technology demands a new rhetoric** *doxa* in their discussion. It appeared 40 times, in 18 threads, used by 33 different participants. These two were followed closely by a series of *doxa* related to agency, ease, and technology's harmfulness. **Technology is an agent** appeared 37 times across 14 threads in the posts of 22 different users, while **Students and teachers have personal agency with technology** appeared about as often, 31 times in the posts of 23 users over 15 different threads. The recognition that students and teachers need personal agency with technology also appeared often, 27 times in 14 threads. These were well spread out over a variety of threads and users. **Technology makes things easier, more efficient, or more effective** was also frequently used, appearing 29 times in 12 different threads, used by 25 different participants. **Technology is not harmful** appeared very frequently, being used 35 times by 23 users in 13

threads, while its opposing notion, **Technology is harmful** appeared only 25 times from only 16 users in 13 threads.

Though the range of subjects in these threads is broad (everything from online learning and automated placement to smart translation apps and contemporary film editing), as a result of this analysis a fairly cohesive set of themes emerged as centers for mild and usually friendly dispute centering around central *doxa*. The interweaving of these *doxa* is complex, and could be treated either narratively or by a more analytical classificatory scheme. In Chapter 5, I more thoroughly describe the most important (generally but not simply the most frequent) of these salient themes and some of the ways these ideological positions interact and complicate one another. Before doing so, however, I wish to discuss ways the LISTSERV text resisted and complicated my analysis.

Issues presented by LISTSERV texts for rhetorical analysis

Grabill and Pigg (2012) state the challenge inherent to studying this kind of digital text:

> The interactions (as text) are persistent in time and space and non-linear in terms of when and how participants engage. Interactions in online systems do not result in well-bounded texts or moments in time. The actors are many, are not around often or very long, and typically engage via textual fragments. (pp. 99-100)

Such difficulty is certainly true of texts in this sample; the graphical representation of one thread's timeline in Figure 4.4, for instance, gets at much of

the complexity characteristic of LISTSERV interactions. This particular discussion, in fact, is a good example of many of the issues e-mail lists present as texts for rhetorical analysis. Reading any text for claims, responses, and warrants or *doxa* is a complex act, fraught with interpretive risk-taking and requiring time commitments, careful record keeping, and long periods of detailed analysis. The sheer multiplicity of this text exacerbated all of those complexities such that there was little there that could be considered "well-bounded." Nevertheless, ordering the text in a meaningful way is possible—and important. The critic takes on a substantial task in ordering the text in such a way that they can effectively analyze and describe it. The text demands considerable forethought, reiteration, and reflection in the analytical phases, which is why I have attempted to be so descriptive and transparent here and throughout.

Figure 4.4 is a thread arc visualization (Kerr, 2003) of a five-day-long WPA-L conversation that evolved over the course of three different subject lines: "The Ideal Writing Environment," "Writing = Technology," and "Writing horseshoe-of-horse-heading-east Technology." Thread arc visualization is a technique that displays the chronology of messages in a thread along with branching relationships in the conversation. Threads are represented by message nodes connected by relationship arcs. In Figure 4.4, nodes are presented vertically in two columns, with the first message in the thread at the top left of the figure and the last message in the thread at the bottom right. Each circular node represents a message in that thread; these nodes are equally spaced in the

order the messages they represent were posted to the WPA-L. Relationship arcs, or "reply to" arcs, connect each message node to its parent in the thread, showing the network of replies across time. Arcs are drawn to either side of the nodes in order to more clearly suggest the relationship between messages. Kerr (2003) has pointed out that this visualization is useful for visually scanning large threads in order to "interpret or get a sense of the conversations taking place" (p. 213). The densely woven threads in Figure 4.4 suggest the complex network of messages and sub-threads in the larger conversation. Discussions start and stop, messages are replied to hours and sometimes days later, and multiple separate but related conversations occur at the same time.

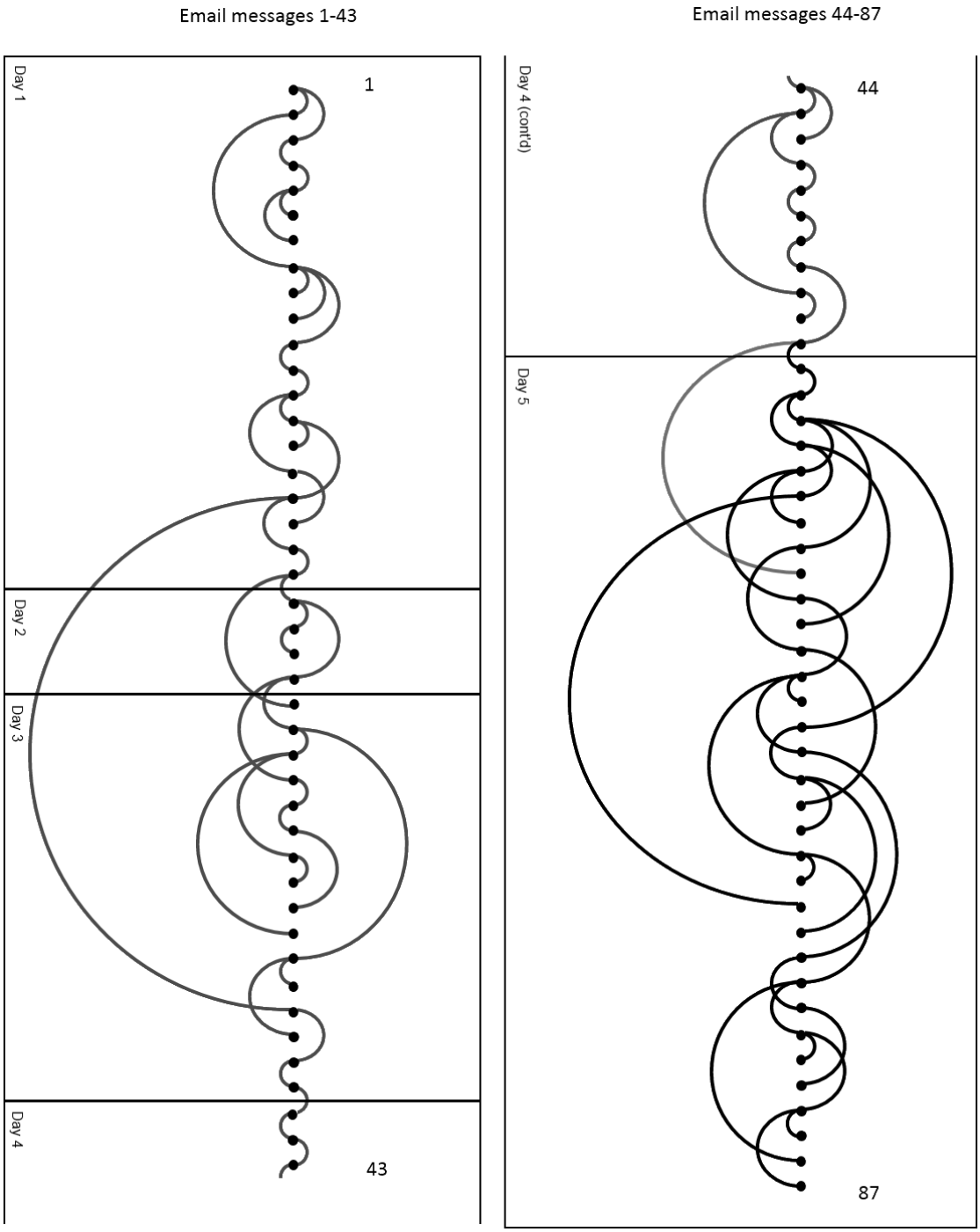

Figure 4.4 Thread Arc Visualization of Three WPA-L Threads

In the three threads visualized in Figure 4.4, a straightforward idyllic "wish list" question that asked list users what they would like to have in their ideal writing space developed into a lengthy series of e-mail exchanges that only at the very beginning answer the first writer's query. A few participants offered their playful ideals (complete with sherry and fish tanks), and then one user made an offhand comment in closing his e-mail, noting that dedicated computer labs are "increasingly a waste of resources." With that, the conversation rapidly turned into a much more serious discourse about the implications of technologized writing spaces, the Plato-Ong memory and literacy technology argument, assumptions about student computer access, and users' own expectations about technology, writing, and the university. Even later, the thread turned into a debate about whether or not computers (laptops in particular) are even essential for writing instruction in the first place and eventually whether compositionists can (or should) conceive of writing separately from technology. This activity all occurred on the initial thread of 53 messages over the course of four days. On the fourth day, one participant attempted to descriptively focus the discussion by changing the subject line from "The Ideal Writing Environment" to "Writing = Technology." This change is short-lived , only lasting for two messages; in fact, before the second message that shares this "Writing = Technology" subject line was posted, another participant changed the subject line again, to the metaphorically complex "Writing Horseshoe of-horse-heading-east Technology." This 32-message thread began a lively, recursive, and

multithreaded conversation for the rest of the day (a Saturday in June 2011). The discussion here is especially complex to follow, as Figure 4.4 suggests; some participants conversed in multiple subthreads at the same time, some individuals replied to themselves multiple times in order to add on to their earlier statements, and others reached back to earlier messages in the thread in attempts to draw things more closely together. At one point, two particular users engaged in two brief but separate one-on-one dialogues at the same time on different topics within the same thread. Indeed, with its two subject line changes and rich tapestry of concepts and lines of argument, this discussion challenges the very term "thread." Such a term implies a hierarchical sequence of messages that can be grouped or strung together in a linear fashion, but whether read in an e-mail client or in the online archives, the chronolinear appearance of messages on the screen, whether the software provides message threading or not, is a vast oversimplification of what's going on. As anyone who has participated in an online discussion knows, the end of a thread often has more to do with timing out than resolving the topic; it unravels, rather than being snipped.

This conversation exemplifies many rhetorical moves and other qualities I noted while analyzing the corpus; while I did not treat appeals to authority, use of personal experience, or anecdotal generalizations to rigorous methods of content

analysis and cannot make claims about how often they appear[20], I do not hesitate to claim the following about these e-mail list conversations: in most threads, there is not always a clear claim-data-warrant-backing-counterclaim-rebuttal structure to e-mail messages. They are much more fragmented, and are often "distracted texts" wherein a nonexplicit claim, subclaim, or imagined claim might inspire an entire new argument. The aforementioned comment about the wastefulness of computer labs is one example of this change. Another instance is in the later thread "Writing horseshoe-of-horse-heading-east Technology." Two users were sidetracked into a multi-exchange discussion about blogging in the writing classroom and Amish technological values, inspired by one writer's offhand comment about why students should be expected to have computers. In many cases, these conversations were not started argumentatively; more conversations begin with questions and shared links or resources (n=34 and 7, respectively) than with messages containing a clearly stated claim (n=8).

Argument and *doxa* emerge regardless of the original poster's intention in starting an exchange. In another thread that very practically explored how to cite e-reader editions of books, argumentative posts appear: about the value of print media over digital and claims about how digital texts misbehave and must be "policed" to be useful. Of course, there was also much discussion in this sample

[20] Each of these types of evidence would make for interesting points of analysis in a future study, describing methods of specificity this community relies upon and seems to value most.

that goes uncomplicated: queries about whether other users have experience with a particular tool, or messages that excitedly shared useful new resources for teaching argumentation, rhetoric, or other aspects of composition.

All of these issues relate to a larger topic: although WPA-L users clearly think of the list as an important knowledge space, there is a range of potential goals for the discourse represented here. Is the WPA-L a space for persuasion, where users move and are moved by others to positions? Is it a consensus space, where agreement on new topics (machine grading, for example) is formed and codified, and where new members of the community can perpetually dip in, discover, and make use of (or confront) such consensus? Is it a social network, a space for discussion and being heard? Or is the WPA-L a forum where users can pitch stones into the pool and see what ripples emerge, discovering what others in the community have to say and inventing further disruption or reinforcement from the talk that comes back? All of these make sense. The WPA-L is clearly an ideological space, and it is a messy one.

Finally, a few important limitations. First, the WPA-L includes both writers and audiences, but this critical rhetorical analysis can't describe the impact of the list on its audience in precise terms. As noted earlier, exchanges in this sample were driven by a relatively small set of speakers. Ideology is produced and performed by a loud minority, but there is a very large audience watching and occasionally chiming in. Though I can make claims about participants and their arguments, those claims are limited because I can't know how many users were

reading what messages. Of the more than 3,000 subscribers, how many saw and were affected by these particular topics? The answer is "more than are posting," but that cannot be quantified. Although many users self-report the importance of the WPA-L in their own professional lives on the list itself, that importance and influence is difficult to measure. Rather, the text is interpreted emically, on its own terms, with sensitivity to how the actively writing participants understand its importance.

It's important to remember that this analysis is specific to people who post about technology on the WPA-L, and may not be purely representative of *all* users in the WPA-L mailing list community. Users post on topics that are most interesting to them, and don't post on topics they don't care about. Most of the posts on "Happy Birthday WPA-L" were from low- and middle-frequency posters, very few of whom participated in the "Writing horseshoe-of-horse-heading-east Technology" conversation, a thread that was dominated by high frequency posting personalities. Both of these were "about" technology in that the messages discuss and reflect on that topic, but they were about technology in very different ways, and different populations of users posted messages to them. A conversation about using Xtranormal to teach argumentation included only one poster in common with a thread begun on the same day about online writing instruction and FERPA. Regardless, in the variety of speakers and topics, and in the interconnectedness of the *doxa* I analyzed, there is clearly a set of master ideas that dominate and are thus influential in the community.

This analysis is also limited because it can't account for back-channel conversation. There could be more to these conversations in private e-mail messages that were not directed to the list. I've seen particular instances where discussions on WPA-L have spilled out into other forums, such as the Techrhet mailing list, or on colleagues' Facebook profiles. The ideology manifested in this sample is only a part of what was going on; it is important in that it is public and was performed publically, but there are other mundane texts that could be imbricated here as well. These limitations carefully temper this analysis, and make generalization impossible. In this study, however, generalization is not the point; instead, analysis points toward descriptions of and inferences drawn about this slice of the larger community. A larger-scale, more complete future analysis could make these connections, based on analysis of other years, other communities, and other disciplinary texts; this study is designed as a first step in that direction, and so the results are not only meaningful now in their tentativeness, but potentially meaningful in the future in the context of other related results. It is in the context of these limitations that I strongly reiterate the WPA-L's importance as an ideological site, a rhetorically significant face of composition and rhetoric that is not only public but also seen as important and representative of the discipline by those who participate in it. The conclusions I present are specific to these users at that time and in that site, but remain an opportunity to point to important implications for composition and rhetoric as well as the larger WPA ideology.

CHAPTER V

TECHNOLOGICAL *DOXA* AND IDEOLOGY ON THE WPA-L

> Opinions, in this sense, function similarly to tradition in that they are unreasoned beliefs whose force actively prevents an engagement with reason. Far from being erratic or capricious, they tend to act more as steadfast obstructions to knowledge—in other words, *doxa* seems to incline itself toward orthodoxy. (Muckelbauer, 2008, p. 154)

In Chapter 4, I described and presented results of my analysis of technology- and digital writing-focused discussions on the WPA-L, highlighting *doxa*, central themes, and the complications and limitations of this type of e-mail discussion for rhetorical analysis. In this chapter, I present the most important doxastic understandings and rhetorics of technology and writing that operate in the corpus, and I present the most well-developed or evocative examples of those *doxa*. The array of perspectives on composing and digiality extant on the WPA-L is complex, but this chapter focuses on four tightly interrelated clusters of ideas: (1) the generic relationship between the field of composition and technology; (2) understandings of the relative newness or importance of digital writing technologies; (3) a cluster of ideas related to agency and empowerment; and (4) a cluster of *doxa* related to how these participants rely on an instrumentalist conception of digital writing technologies, using and describing them primarily in terms of augmentation.

Despite Porter's (2007) injunction that composition doesn't know what to do with technology, there is an apparent "everydayness" for many kinds of digital writing technology in the discourse of WPA-L participants; the WPA-L is no

Luddites' club. Regardless, there are some doxastic notions extant in the community's discourse that separate it a great deal from the kinds of apex discourse typified by the computers and composition community. To work with the structure from Chapter 2, there are many techno-optimists alongside the techno-critics on the WPA-L, but these are also not precisely practitioners of Yancey's digitally-rich 21st century composition. Summarizing his 2011 Computers and Writing presentation, based on Bedford/St. Martin's survey and questionnaire data, Nick Carbone describes a clear conservatism characterizing compositionists' adoption of digital technology:

> Most digital technology use is fairly conservative and centered around text and prose based practices that many in computers and composition first explored 30 years ago. A second divide occurs in the practices of 2 year colleges, where the use of technology focuses more (not exclusively, but more) on using technology that is, to borrow Meeks' phrase, "more packaged" and meant to help relieve workloads or create some instructional efficiencies. (Carbone, 2011, para. 22)

This recognition, sadly enough, is not new. What Fred Kemp (2005b) has pointed out about composition more broadly seems still to be true: "the problem remains that most of the country's first-year college students are undergoing writing instruction that is not effectively informed by the best thinking in the field" (p. 106). As with many other teaching practices in composition and rhetoric, turns to technology are not necessarily about best practice, but the most efficient practice.

The *doxa* described in Chapter 4 are here classified under four polysemic headings: (1) composing technology, (2) viewing technology, (3) empowering technology, and (4) using technology. These gerunds operate as verbs as well as

adjectives, suggesting the complexity inherent in drawing lines between these interrelated categories. WPA-L participants discursively compose technologies as they write about—and simultaneously with—various composing technologies around them. Participants understand technology as empowering and are empowered by using it even as they empower technology by constructing it as an agent.

Overall, the *doxa*, themes, and other data presented this chapter seem to uphold Dobrin's assessment of composition studies. Despite the "inextricable bond" between writing and technology and the now nearly ubiquitous way that digital technology is invested in composition and rhetoric's scholarly and pedagogical work:

> Composition studies' technological research is often hamstrung by the limits of two primary lines of inquiry: first, the debate as to whether or not technologies, digital technologies in particular, are beneficial or detrimental to writing/writers, and, second, how might writers and teachers use technologies as tools to improve their writing and teaching of writing. (Dobrin, 2011b, pp. 175–176)

The problem underlying both lines of inquiry is that technology is understood as apparatus, external element, rather than something indistinguishable from the writing. As described in Chapter 4, this conception of technology is the highest-occurring *doxa* in the corpus, and since nearly all of the other themes here will point toward it, my discussion of technology as augmentation or prosthesis will close Chapter 5.

Considering the claims about a largely un- or anti-technological composition and rhetoric which I've described from Porter, Dobrin, and others, as well as my own anecdotal understanding of the WPA-L community from the readings of my own professional network, which includes technical communication- , computers and composition- , and digital rhetoric-oriented scholars and teachers, this slice of the WPA-L was a markedly pro-tech community. The negative *doxa*, such as **technology is harmful** and **writing is not technology**, occurred with much lower frequency than their positive counterparts —some of them by a wide margin (see Table 4.5). Certainly no ideological monolith, the group of users here embodied a rich network of claims, experiences, and beliefs regarding newness, computer technology, and digital writing. The WPA-L community was not especially "antitech," and I wish to reiterate that point here and throughout this chapter; however, participants' ideas were limited to some conceptions of technology that get in the way of embracing digital writing in the same ways that those other related fields have.

In this chapter, I rely on the document number system I generated during analysis to refer to different threads. As described previously, ATLAS.ti uses the term "primary document" for individual texts; I used separate text documents to chronologically organize different threads. For example, the thread beginning on January 5 with the subject line "Citation question about E-readers" is denoted as p1 for "primary document 1." Many of the subject lines are lengthy, and such a denotation system avoids some laborious repetition of lengthy phrases. However,

in some cases particularly interesting subject lines are discussed as such. I provide a complete list of subject lines, primary document numbers, and other information about these threads in the Appendix. I rely on a u_letter-number format to refer to individual users. Direct quotations are cited parenthetically with a document-user notation, such as (p1 u_d14). When citing multiple participants in the same thread, the citation appears as: (p1 u_d14, u_k05). Multiple participants in multiple threads appear as: (p1 u_d14; p3, u_j04). As described in the previous chapter, user numbers were randomly generated for convenience in coding and analysis. Because the text is publicly archived on the Internet, full anonymity is impossible; however, due to the nature of the audience for this text and the goals of the study such anonymity is also unnecessary, as has been described in more fully in Chapter 3. I have retained participants' own original spelling and grammar as much as possible, only making changes to enhance clarity of referents and grammatical cohesion.

Composing technology

This theme is an important reminder: as composition and rhetoric wrestles with implications of technology and digital writing tools for its practices and theory, it discursively constructs—or composes—technology (and literally, too, with e-mail). Because the LISTSERV is an inventive, collaborative space where ideas emerge and are developed—where users engage in thinking through things in their text—abstract concepts like "technology" are constituted. WPA-L

users not only give their positions and experiences with the subject; they also attempt to develop those positions in more precise ways and see their ideas changed as other participants read and wrestle with the juxtapositions of multiple writers at the same time. Resolution, consensus, or conclusion is not always the result of these conversations, so different conceptions of technology are left operant at the end of discussions. The audiences here—the other participants, but also the many silent readers for whom the discussion exists as an archive of lines of thinking—are left with very real compositions, or pictures, of technology. In a broad sense, composition composes and composes with technology. In being made of many individuals, the field simultaneously embraces and resists being composed by the technology it composes.

For 14 of these writers, technology clearly constitutes something outside of the purview of composition and rhetoric. Whether software applications or hardware, technology is "something else" that certainly might affect how writing is produced or delivered, but doesn't rate as something that should change the field's philosophical approach to writing or get in the way of our instruction in it. Technology is an augmentation, separable from a universally-conceived or highly individualized writing act. For writers who rejected "writing as tech" or a vision of writing instruction that is fundamentally and profoundly influenced by changes in technology, writing is a generalizable concept, process, and way of thinking about and reacting to the world. Writing is occasionally described as cognition, a mental process rather than a material practice, and this process is

mostly unaffected by materials. This conception is very different from Ong's long-held sense—so essential to computers and writing and technical communication discourses—that writing is itself a literacy technology substantially rooted in and affected by materiality (2002) as well as human cognition. There seem to only be six outspoken advocates for the perspective that writing is itself a literacy technology, less than half the number of those who claimed technology is beyond composition and rhetoric's demesne.

Though "technology" or "digital writing" as broad topics were rarely taken up as such in these threads, the longer and more contentious discussions in the sample turned on participants' understanding of writing as much as or more than their understanding of technology. Two sets of threads are especially good examples: p16 and p17, in which participants wrestled with the implications of translation technology and smart phone apps; and p28, p29, and p30, in which participants took up issues of materiality and writing in theoretical terms in the entire sample.

Technologies for composition

Threads p16 and p17 developed in response to an "interesting" situation presented in the initial message. A Korean student in a composition class turned in an essay for which he utilized an application on his smart phone. The essay was idiomatically and stylistically superior to the student's other work and at the same time retained the rhetorical and structural characteristics of his other work.

The student would combine the voice-to-text and translation capabilities of his device to dictate in Korean, get English translations, and then used those translations (either through e-mail or manual input) in his final paper. The query that began the discussion wrestled with a common trope in the literature about computers and digital writing: the changed nature of authorship in a digital world. The question interrogated a human/machine line: If a foreign language student uses a translation app to compose an essay in English, is the essay "his" (p16 u_j16)? This question begat a discussion propelled by competing understandings of what writing is and what the goal of a writing course ought to be. One writer specifically noted that the question could be viewed through two frames: "Apparently there's a difference between viewing this question as one of *writing technology* and viewing it as one of *language knowledge*" (p16 u_d05).

Two notions of writing competed in responses to this query: writing as performance of surface-level language skill and writing as deeper-seated language competencies. Participants who discussed writing instruction from a skill orientation were more comfortable with writers using tools to augment their performance. Users u_j25, u_c02, u_r02, and u_l02 compared the student's translation app to editors and already-familiar editing software. We use human proofreaders, spell-checkers, and grammar checkers because they are good technology, and without them we would be "doomed" (p16 u_l02). When competence is not the issue and the function of the course is to improve

performance, then "Writing technology such as spell checkers improves my performance. It fits the purpose and nature of the course" (u_d05). One participant categorized the smart use of these helps under the broader idea of "composition smarts," which he defined as "knowing how to use the available tools to make writing better" (p16 u_j25). Tools that help students (L1 or L2) by making the performance of written language easier allow students to work through their ideas without the barrier of a particular language (p16 u_c21, u_l02). One author (only one here) went so far as to argue for a cyborg conception: that computer-assisted writing is now part of linguistic competence in ways that it was not before (p16 u_d05). Another recognized the possibility of "other, newer processes" (u_l02) for writing that we may be unnecessarily resisting. Tools are appropriate and acceptable when writing instruction is primarily about perfection of skill performance.

Participants who defined the goal of writing instruction in terms of deeper language competencies (organization, argumentation, exposition, working from researched evidence, although "competence" is left undefined in the thread) tended to be less forgiving about technologies that make surface processes easier. "To write in English" (u_k11) is not the same as to use a translation tool to get to English transcription. Knowledge of the language and producing thinking are the goals of composition instruction, rather than simply the "product" of polished prose (u_c19, u_s08). The familiar dichotomy between meaning and message also played into this discussion. One writer concluded that "If it's a 'content course,'

then translation technology (or human translators) is probably OK. But if the purpose is learning to write/communicate in English, it seems more problematic" (p17, u_j19).

Despite differences, both sides of the discussion relied on a similar conception of technology: as a tool that augments, makes easier, and potentially distorts the writing act. Technology enhances performance. When students relinquish agency and depend on these tools to author—to intrude before comprehension or competence—the augmentation becomes considered "cheating" (u_j16), going down a "slippery slope" or opening a "can of worms" (u_c19) by introducing too much help and "hinder[ing] the student's ability to learn" (u_a01). On the other hand, such apps provide the opportunity for exhibiting technological and linguistic agency: translators work for "complex generation of lexicon, syntax, tone, and style" and successful use of them depend on the student's ability to understand and control the translator software (p16 u_d05, u_c25, u_s08; p17 u_c21). If students can control their software—if they have agency over the technology—then the technology use becomes less controversial. As long as technology is an optional add-on, the writer retains agency as an authoritative subject, and so this group of WPA-L participants judged such augmentations acceptable because the technology has been minimized.

Cognition and composition

As mentioned in Chapter 4, some discussions emerged tangentially in conversations that began only distantly concerned with problems of technology. One of these is among the longer and more interesting discussions in the entire corpus of threads examined in this study. P28, p29, and p30 (visualized in Figure 4.4) encompass a single discussion that survived five days and two subject line changes: the idyllically-begun "The Ideal Writing Environment" was changed briefly into the claim-oriented subject "Writing = Technology," which shifted a final time to a folksy but no less claim-driven "Writing horseshoe-of-horse-heading-east Technology." This set of threads developed doxastically, as a result of participants' conflicting beliefs and values about technology and writing rather than some claim made explicitly in the originating message, eventually turning into a long-ranging multi-threaded discussion in which participants wrestled with the very nature of writing and technology and how that nature potentially affects disciplinary (in this case classroom) practice. As in p16, the participants' understanding of writing (both as human practice and as object of instruction, research, and theory) was closely tied to how they construct technology.

An ideologically-charged discussion about the relationship between writing, technology, and thought emerged out of a very practical question: how do individuals on the WPA-L imagine their ideal writing environment? After a series of descriptive messages detailing layouts, accessories, visuals,

atmospheres, and the relative availability of alcohol, participant u_s10 made an offhanded comment about computer labs:

> I guess what I'm getting at is I don't think places where one really writes map well with classroom spaces, and that includes computer labs, which are increasingly kind of a waste of resources, IMO. But that's another story. (p28 u_s10)

What's interesting here is that the conversation made a major departure from ideal spaces, but not with regard to the point that u_s10 was actually trying to make. The major claim in this message made a distinction: "writing spaces" and "teaching writing spaces" are quite different, and then that some of the classroom spaces described don't work at all well for both. The offhand "another story" comment about computer labs was the last sentence of a four-paragraph message, but it was that comment which piqued the curiosity of the next two participants, who began a conversation that quickly took over the thread: a serious discourse about the digital divide and problems of access to technology in universities. The concept quite literally affects the materiality of the conversation, generating enough interest from participants that the subject line changed twice.

U_s10 worked from a few ideas: that computer technology is ubiquitous in our culture (enough so that universities don't need to provide permanent labs), and that requiring students to be responsible for their own technology (i.e. purchasing a laptop instead of a university-run computer lab) is within the normal technological and economic grasp of students. The technology is

important because it "has become/is becoming a basic tool, and we ought to encourage/require that" (p28 u_s10). Participant u_a08 provided representative disagreement in this case: the technology is important, and students need them, but the economic realities of a digital divide necessitate some university-provided technological access:

> However, the financial circumstances of my students is an issue that is very dear to me, and I bristle anytime I suspect changes that would make it even harder for my most financially troubled students to attend college. As Dennis Baron wrote, "Technology always has a trailing edge," and in higher ed, unfortunately, that trailing edge is jagged and aimed at the poorest students. (p28 u_a08)

And:

> I agree with you that computer labs are not the ideal. The ideal, of course, is for every student to have a laptop, to use anywhere they want to go. The reality, however, is that not all students can afford them, colleges can't afford to supply them, and financial aid...well, you know how that goes. And even just one student unable to do her coursework because of not having access to a computer is one too many. (p28 u_a08, new message in reply to another participant)

Both of these individuals—and five others in this thread—agreed about the importance of technology as a tool and connected computers to forms of agency for students, but in this case the participants' assumptions about computing's ubiquity generated a new conversation. This point—assumptions of access, inspired yet another tangent for the discussion, a debate about whether computers (specifically laptops) are essential for writing instruction in the first place:

> More and more learning digitally is essential both to learning but also to every day living. (p28 u_s10)

Some exemplary responses to this claim clearly framed computer technology as an augmentation; something that is there and may have some effect on writing, but in the end isn't necessary for "writing" or "good writing" abstractly defined:

> Yes, you can produce good writing on a laptop, but laptops aren't necessary to produce good writing. (p28 u_r06)

> The danger is promoting the belief that good writing can't be produced without a certain kind of technology. That is a false and destructive belief. (p28 u_r06)

> The computer is only necessary for class if we require the writing to be posted online. (p28 u_m38)

To which came the ironic response:

> other than printing it out, getting the content into a form that can be printed, revising it, storing it, and researching the content that is in the printed essay, computers are kind of an extra in the writing class. (u_s10)

From this point, the conversation shifted again—from questions of cultural and social ubiquity and the importance of a particular technology to questions of the materiality of writing itself. Some participants seemed to believe that writing is not simply embedded in particular technologies or filtered through them, but effected by and even inseparable from the materials used:

> Writing with a computer affects the way you think about your writing. Writing with a typewriter is different from writing with a pencil. . . I don't agree with the belief that technologies are transparent. (p28 u_r16)

> Assuming that one only "refines" the skills applied in old technologies pretty much means that one will be the last to learn and least to lead. Composing digitally differs in many significant ways from composing with a pencil and paper. While some famous people have clutched their pencils on the way to their coffins, they did so at a price. (p28 u_l06)

> I don't think that "writing" is separable from technologies. Writing isn't only mental; it's physical and social. Without genres and technologies and

> discourse communities in which the transactions matter, we're not talking about the same experience. We use the same word, but it isn't the same mental or physical process when the technologies change. (p28 u_l06)

Two notions were reiterated in responses to these claims: the *quality of writing*, and what became a central belief later in the discussion, that *writing is a cognitive rather than material act*. Participant u_r06 took a strong stance against convenience and relevance as the most important values when teaching writing as he claimed:

> Well, I don't believe that writing technology is transparent either, and I don't believe that writing process can be separated from writing product either. But when I teach a writing class, I believe I get to choose how much time I devote to technology and how much time I devote to process and how much time I devote to other things. Like quality of the writing. (u_r06)

Participant u_m38 (who along with r06 and s10 is the most frequent poster in the corpus) worked from a cognitive perspective, relying on the pencil as a generic symbol for the agency derived by inscription devices:

> If it is true that the technology changes the writing, then it might also be true that the loss of a given writing technology represents a narrowing of the range of human composition and thought. Is the real price--in terms of 'biodiversity' --paid when a writer clutches to his pencil, or when a writing teacher wrests the pencil away? (u_m38)

Belief in the importance of writing is to be expected; still, there is variety in how writing was framed and understood by participants.

At the end of the fourth day of this discussion, the subject line briefly changed to "Writing = Technology." Participant u_s10 claimed this move was in order "to make it more descriptive" (p29). Such a change was risky in that it ran

the possibility of losing participants who might only have been paying attention to the previous thread, but it also created an opportunity to steer the conversation and invite new participants with a more appropriate subject line. There was a substantial turnover in participants over the course of the subject line changes. In p28 there are 21 participants, and in p30 there are nine, but the makeup shifted considerably, and there are distinct differences in who participated as the conversation moved. Of the original 21, 16 participants did not continue to post after the subject lines changed, despite the fact that six of them were specifically engaged in the writing-technology conversation to that point. After the subject line change in p30, only five of the original participants continued posting, but they were joined by four completely new people. Again, the concepts under discussion affected the materiality of the conversation (its subject line), and that material shift in turn changed the conversation's participants.

Regardless of who joined and who fell out, the two subject line changes were loaded with meaning and intent: "Make it more descriptive" (p29 u_s10) could potentially be translated as: *make the claim clearer* or also as *solidify my claim by making it more visible*, a reasonable assumption considering his inclusion of the = symbol rather than saying "is." Or is the substitution an attempt to transcend the burden of the words "is" and "equals" and move into the realm of logical proofs and relationships?

Nevertheless, according to this participant, writing:

> *is* a technology in that writing has always required tools of some sort or another, even if that tool is only written language. We have always been technology workers, even though people in English studies and writing often don't think of it that way. (p29 u_s10)

This claim is important enough that he reiterated it twice:

> the idea of writing without tools/technology is really just not possible.
>
> what you write and how you can write it is directly related to the technologies you use to write. (p29 u_s10)

Before the one response (an agreement) that shares this subject line is even posted, the subject-line-change-as-argumentative-strategy occured again the next morning, where the discussion continued for the rest of the day (a Saturday afternoon). Here, u_r06 took his own understanding of the writing-technology pairing and added a visual/logical level to it. "Writing horseshoe-of-horse-heading-east Technology" is both metaphor and description, using the prosthetic relationship of horse and shoe to imply a writing-tech relationship while at the same time describing the logical sign ⊃, for a conditional if-then proposition.

This conversation proceeded as a result of two competing (and unresolved) definitions of writing, writing as a literacy technology that does not exist prior to/without materiality (Gee & Hayes, 2011; Ong, 2002; Ong is cited in six separate messages in this thread), and writing as a cognitive or mental activity, a "something else, a kind of proto-writing, before it gets involved with technology" (p30 u_r06).

Four of the participants in p30 relied on a more or less Ongian conception of writing; that it is "an external technology that transforms thought. Period"

(p30 u_s10). To these writers, languages and scripts are "artificial constructions. They are invented and, therefore, technologies" (p30 u_j27), and that language is not simply thought transcribed but thought changed *as* it is and *because* it is composed: "We must write down our thoughts and in the writing change them as they flow out onto the page/screen" (p30 u_r16). In part, their argument was grounded in the notion that a text must be published (executed into a physical medium for distribution to an audience) to count as "writing."

For the other five participants, language is prior to technology. For one writer, good writing is characterized by abstractions such as clarity and grace, both improvements that are "independent of technology" (p30 r06). Other participants tugged at distinctions between writing understood as the physical act of transcription and composing, the "in my head" narrating and organizing of experience that may or may not be recorded on a page or screen, that unexecuted texts can still be composed (p30 u_m38, u_g08). Two writers classified oral cultures as composing cultures in order to distinguish writing from inscription—a word for writing that itself seems to imply that writing is an after-the-fact technological process; much as medieval scribes were employed to swiftly and accurately copy out preexisting texts, writing was here perceived as a copy machine, transcribing something that exists a priori in the mind. Another participant attempted to bring in Derrida's *Of Grammatology* to upset the binaries at play in the conversation, but his comment went apparently ignored.

All of these notions worked at the doxastic level of belief and were tied to users' individual experiences and ideas of writing. Though the discussion was not formally settled—as many e-mail discussions are not—the final message in the thread, from u_r06, was certainly a powerful evocation of how the conversation seemed to end. Comparing his own mental composition of haiku to a Buddhist monk's use of ink and brush, he imagistically equivocated composing sentences in one's head to composing sentences on paper and screens, insisting that these ways of composing are "all the same" and none better than another (p30). Writing, for this user, is not simply a material, physical action implying and necessitating publication, but a cognitive engagement with language and the world, something beyond and before technology. As a close to the conversation, this passage is representative of a romantic and expansive view of writing, one that resists technological intrusion. From this perspective, compositions do not have to be composed in any medium other than the writer's own mind and do not have to have an effect beyond one on the writer during creation in order to count as compositions (p30 u_g08)—this conception is the apotheosis of anti-product lines of thinking in composition and rhetoric. The implication of rejecting products for abstract processes is that technology is resisted and rejected in favor of the human, thinking agent. These WPA-L writers showed a deep-seated interest in the writer's subjectivity, something that is not "wrong" *per se* but does, as Dobrin has pointed out, limit composition's ability to attend to writing itself (2011a). As is clear from Chapter 2, digital writing and computing technology

have upset traditional models of writing instruction; the discussion here also makes clear that those conceptions aren't nearly as settled as we might think.

Composition and rhetoric and technology

Though they did not necessarily inspire contention or vitriolic discussion, the two threads examined thus far included some of the most vigorous multisided debate in the sample—as I have described, this vigor seems to exist at least in part because the participants were grappling with their own basic beliefs about what writing is: that it is a highly individual cognitive process that should be abstracted from specific media or technology. That discussion focused on technological intersections with writing as process, as product, and as object of instruction. A related set of *doxa* have to do with whether LISTSERV posters conceived of computing and technology issues to within the scope of the field of composition and rhetoric (and, more broadly, the humanities). This section details WPA-L understandings of the relationship between the composition and rhetoric as a discipline, institution, and identity, and the array of technologies that affect its daily practices.

Unlike themes in the two threads covered above, this idea is not a site of specific debate in a limited set of threads; rather, it encapsulates a mixture of descriptive and evaluative positions on composition and technology. Overall, 23 writers conceptualized technology and digital writing as something that composition does or ought to do, a notion that was sometimes complicated with

their assessment of how others inside or outside of the field perceive this relationship. Another much smaller group (only two users) understood technology as something distinct from or extraneous to the work of composition and rhetoric.

The **technology and humanistic studies are distinct enterprises** *doxa* is one of the few codes was not only developed from but that also remained important from Haas' 1997 scheme for ideological warrants; in her analysis it was the fifth most common ideological warrant (used four times by three authors, or in one-third of her sample). The primary example she used was Richard Lanham, who set up an opposition between literary studies and the outside technological world to motivate his readers (Haas, 1997, pp. 190-191). Haas' own goal throughout *Writing Technology* was to generate enthusiasm for research lines in writing studies and composition that examine the technology question. Among this group of WPA-L participants, such an enthusiasm has been generated, though not universally. Again, in this corpus, the argumentative assumption that technology and composition should be distinct enterprises occured infrequently, only two times, though many of the participants that assume composition and technology are not distinct recognized that this idea isn't shared by those outside the discipline (occurring nine times) or inside it (five times). At least five times, users argued that the sense that composition and rhetoric is a technological discipline needs to be further developed.

The two users who claimed that composition and technology are distinct enterprises might concede that digital literacies are important, but otherwise argued that they can't or even shouldn't be "the focal point" (p6 u_j15) of writing instruction. This de-technologized composition might also arise out of local constraints rather than *doxa*; one participant recognized that because access is limited, many FYC and writing programs are "not as conducive" to high use of technology and a focus on digital literacies (p45 u_a14). Another noted ironically that most professors wouldn't have a clue about "what to do with a room full of laptop-using students" (p45 u_a15), while at least nine users showed concern that instructors in composition and the humanities don't know how to engage contemporary issues of digital publication, open access, and new models of scholarly production (p39 u_j11). There is an obvious similarity here to the "writing is not technology" conversations in other threads; limitations may be just as much economically and institutionally-derived (limited technology support, or an inability of students to afford computers) as they are the result of beliefs about writing and human cognition and traditional relationships between humanities and the sciences. To some participants in this group of WPA-L users, technology is important, but isn't really central to what we do for a variety of reasons.

At least five users were clearly aware that despite their own assumptions, the "WPA FYC tech-plank" of the composition and rhetoric platform needs development (p6 u_j15). This position built upon or was an outgrowth of the

previous one—composition needs to programmatically overcome the institutionalized historical divide between literacy programs and technological study. Research and work on incorporating digital literacy into curricula has been done, but it's not "part of their territory" (p6 u_j01) and according to these five users, this state ought to be overcome. In a thread discussing outreach work by the Purdue OWL staff, one participant noted that there's often a gap between "people who might know technology" and "online learning theory" and those who "know writing and the teaching of writing" (p5 u_n01), and that it's good to see people setting an example for doing both. This position was also reflected in a series of discussions about professional development, institutes, speakers, and workshops to help encourage faculty and students in teaching and writing with digital technologies (p6, p23, p27). Writing programs are putting together "immersive professional development initiative[s] on digital technologies" (p23 u_j15) and "week-long writing with technology institute[s] (p23 u_a06); others are creating "Digital Writing Centers" at community colleges (p52 u_l09) and trying to meet the challenges of getting "contingent faculty to make this pedagogical leap" (p6 u_j01). This is certainly evidence that despite claims about instructors who don't know what to do with a class full of laptop-enabled students, there are leaders in place at rural and community colleges as well as large state programs who perceive that composition isn't digital enough and are working to ameliorate the situation.

Nine participants also recognized that that composition's status as a technologized discipline is misunderstood by those outside the field. One of the most common outsiders participants described was university administration. Two commenters in the "Happy Birthday WPA-L" thread noted the long history of having to "convince the campus poo-bahs that English teachers had all kinds of uses for technology" (p19 u_a11), while another entire thread was devoted to institutional resistance to faculty lines in digital rhetoric and new media because "the dean doesn't understand why this position would be in English" (p57 u_m05). In this case, the technologized composition position was so entrenched in the writer's identity that they're not sure how to make a case to an outsider who doesn't see the role of digital technologies in writing programs. As one participant noted, their "spiel" on computers and writing being an integral part of the larger field of English studies is "fresh news to many" (p57 u_s10). Another example of this position is a thread titled "4Cs mentioned on prominent digital game site," in which participants discussed how the composition and rhetoric community is framed by a rhetorical analysis of the term "gamification" at *gamasutra.com*. After the first participant noted that this may be "the first time 4Cs has ever been mentioned on a major gaming site," (p20 u_j32), three users react negatively to the author's traditional characterization of writing teachers as

having "elbow patches and twin sets[21]" (u_l11). This image provoked a discussion of the need to continue "building bridges" between composition and gaming and use games to teach lessons to be applied to writing (u_l11; u_m04). One thread took up the continued problem of technology conversations occurring most often "in technocratic settings" that composition doesn't have access to (p39 u_t07), claiming that we need to participate in these venues rather than allowing them to focus solely on the sciences (p39 u_j11).

These participants seemed to know that composition does digital writing but wrestled with outsiders' surprise or resistance to the idea[22]. I make a slight distinction here between participants who held this position and those participants who worked from a clear understanding that composition and rhetoric *does* digital writing, technology, and 21st century writing—at least broadly defined[23]. One writer excitedly framed the "WPA as 'technorhetorician'" (pd 6, u_j01), one who takes a thoughtful leadership role in integrating digital literacies and pedagogies (u_m08). Eleven writers reminisced about establishing

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[21] A twinset is a matched set of a cardigan and short-sleeved shirt, most common in women's fashion.

[22] In fact, I had some difficulty deciding whether those describing the gap between composition and technology as perceived by outsiders should be dx_compisnottech or dx_compistech, eventually settling on the former to retain similarity to Haas' analysis.

[23] I keep using this term, "broadly defined"—it should almost be a given. Because of the brief and fragmentary nature of WPA-L texts, defining key terms carefully as one would in an academic essay is not often done. Some defining does ensue, but it's limited. (Say, the etymological fascination with the word "hybrid" in p27, a discussion which is largely tangential to assessments of the resource offered in the e-mail that starts the thread; or when a user in p30 attempts to clarify a distinction between technology and creation.)

composition technological practices in the first half of the 1990s, describing now nearly-forgotten tools like Mosaic, Netscape, Bitnet, MBU, green-screen monitors, and daisy wheel printers (p19). Here, composition and rhetoric was included at the earliest times of popular and humanities computing; still, these users rarely seemed to participate in the vision of 21st century composition set forth in "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key" (Yancey, 2004), which is briefly cited by Yancey herself at one point in the corpus (p7). These writing teachers seemed to believe that composition is a technological discipline and operate from that perspective. "Teaching digital composition to students with varying digital literacies" (p52) was one of the few threads that specifically identifies teaching digital writing as a distinct or new thing all of its own and separate from "traditional" writing instruction. At least 75 messages were questions about or specific examples of using new digital technologies in writing classes, including requests for resources implying future use or descriptive-anecdotal statements about current or past use. In fact, **use of new tech** was the highest occurring code in my scheme, with 75 messages attached to this code. In these messages, participants engaged in uncomplicated and uncontroversial reporting of blogs, wikis, and other tools in writing courses. WPA-L users reported on a long list of digital tools that they use both in their own writing and in their teaching, including Blogger, Wordpress, Wikipedia, Xtranormal, Scrivener, Google Docs, LiveScribe, Camtasia, Jing, Twitter, and Facebook (among many others). WPA-L users teach with technology and use it in their own writing practice. Still, much of

this reporting was uncomplicated: in nearly every case, the participants that reported their use of specific technologies to enhance or augment their writing instruction were not the high-frequency posters engaged in lengthy debates like in p28-p30. These were simply teachers and writers sharing their experiences with the stuff they used. Despite resistance from a few of the most verbal participants to defining writing as a technological rather than cognitive act, the users that partcipated in these WPA-L discussions were clearly technologized, and swapping information about tools and their use was a common activity on the list.

Viewing technology

The previous section described an array of wider conceptual relationships between composing, writing and technology; this section attends to a set of *doxa* related to digital writing's newness[24]. I don't have to think hard to remember colleagues in English departments I've been in, complaining about university programs that they thought were too enthralled with being on the "bleeding edge" of technology. For one writer on the WPA-L, embracing new technology simply in order to be "in the culture" puts us in danger of being a "tragic punchline" in less technologically advanced communities' jokes (p30 u_m38).

[24] Enough so that this section was nearly subtitled "Newing technology."

The doxastic positions described thus far—much like in the literature covered in Chapter 2—are rarely out-and-out antitechnological or married to a romantic conception of a bygone golden age. In fact, there is only one writer in the entire corpus who seemed to be profoundly concerned with the negative effects of digital media on cognition. The writer is most concerned with visuals and film texts. Only a small number of writers view new digital technologies as harmful. For at least two of these participants, this perspective can be connected to their conception of print as the more important or fundamental medium and thus the medium by which all other things are measured, rather than what has often been called Luddism.

Indeed, these WPA-L users seem to be current in their use of digital writing technology and recognize technology is important and even beneficial; however, they differ on how they conceptualize its relative newness and effects on writing and writing subjects. For at least 33 users, **new technology demands a new rhetoric** because it resists or confounds our traditional conceptions of writing, communication, and rhetoric; students can do something truly new. For another 13, **new technology can be conceptualized by old rhetoric**, and is easily assimilated by traditional schemes. These 13 participants generally describe new technologies in terms of their worth for helping students understand concepts like audience, but don't focus on how those technologies might change the concept itself.

One thing that didn't occur often in this selection of the WPA-L is the argument that new technology is superior to older tech. In fact, this belief only came up once, in p16, as one writer pointed out that technological augmentations like applications that help one master language are on their way to being culturally ubiquitous. In not embracing this change, we set ourselves behind (or inferior to) "everyone else":

> What we have here is an incredibly rubber-meets-road instance of cyborg culture that's no longer science fiction. And probably by the time (years) we reason our way to an answer, we'll be the only ones still trying to. Everyone else will take it for granted that computer-assisted humans are multi-lingual. (u_d05)

More powerfully stated was the argument that older, print technology is superior to newer, digital tech. In some cases, the claim relied on a belief that print and the advancements associated with it (pagination, in the following case) are the best system available for using texts in a particular way. In a thread exploring citation problems presented by e-readers, u_s10 commented:

> Pagination was a big advancement of print and I personally think that when it comes to the academic/scholarly uses of texts, it either has to be preserved or we need to come up with a better system. And good luck coming up with a better system. So personally, I hope that as textbooks and other academic/scholarly books migrate into electronic forms (which is obviously inevitable), we preserve a sense of pagination. (p1)

In this case, the older system is the better one, valued for its orderliness and stability; this user seems to think that digital systems ought to conform to the print model. In a similarly themed discussion, one writer framed the digital world as problematic; it must be "policed" and won't be useful until such time as it is

standardizable for documentation purposes (p25 u_c09). The digital text is a "problem" not just for citation, but "for teaching in general" (p1 u_s10) because it is unstable, and in some rare cases, even harmful.

Seven of the 25 occurrences of the **technology is harmful** *doxa* came from one particular user, who seems to have been particularly taken with the negative cognitive effects of modern film and visual styles. Her descriptions of technology were among the most negative in the entire selection: "CGI-infested" visuals and the accelerated pace of digital texts result in "zero attention span" and decreasing cognitive loads, a "slow degrading of the cognitive capabilities of people at the age when their ability to reason critically is only being formed" (p13 u_g07). Other appearances of the **technology is harmful** *doxa* didn't have much to do with digital writing in a classroom setting but instead were connected to critiques of the effects of "Big Technology": here, Facebook and Accuplacer were common villains. Facebook was framed as harmful in that it is a community "built on and encourag[ing] narcissism, among other vices" (p26 u_m27), exacerbating larger cultural trends toward status-seeking and exhibitionism (u_n01). When making claims about the harmfulness of software like MyCompLab, users were often concerned with how it affects composition's workforce (p37 u_b05, u_e03, u_d02, u_g09), and considered its "sweatshop mentality" (u_d02) and "one-size-fits-all" program (u_p05) a "blight" on classrooms (p37 u_d20).

The most universally critiqued technologies were those connected to machine grading and placement. Accuplacer and instruments like it are "vile"

(p42 u_k04), "useless" (u_p05), "seductive" (u_g02), valuable only to "its corporate owner" (u_d20), something that "traps students" (p48 u_n01), and "a huge waste of money and sends the wrong message about the importance of writing to students, faculty, and administration alike" (p48 u_m34). The general trend here, however, was for users not to complain about digital writing technologies within writing programs but instead to make an Arnoldian complaint about cultural or corporate values infiltrating the academy through Big Technology.

Still, more users framed digital technology in a positive light than in a harmful one. While the harmful *doxa* appeared 25 times in the texts of 16 different users, **technology is not harmful** appeared much more frequently, 35 times from 23 different users[25]. Our tools "help" (p8 u_j21) us (the discussion in p16 and p17 on the smartphone translator relied on this belief a great deal). Rather than being detrimental and creating a discontinuous cognitive experience, digital texts reflect the "fragmentary, discontinuous, constructed, manufactured, and contradictory" nature of experience (p13 u_m31). Cognitive change as a result of technology isn't a problem, instead they "make us" from a posthuman perspective (p10 u_a13). In terms of classroom practice, "good technology includes more into the conversation" (p16 u_r02), and digital technologies lead to

[25] Related *doxa* include **technology is important**, found 10 times among 13 users, and **technology has positive and negative effects**, appearing 16 times among 12 users.

more textual experience than in previous generations, allowing students to "develop a range or repertoire of writing styles, tone, and formats along with a range of abilities" (Lunsford qtd. in p26 u_c02).

Perhaps even more common was a more neutral notion—that old is old, and new is new, and that values can't be ascribed simply based on the newness of a particular technology. In p13 and p14, on the detrimental effects of modern film work, some version of the following claim was reiterated four times:

> Your dichotomy seems to suggest that older film styles are "good" or "neutral" in a cognitive sense and the new ones aren't. I guess I don't see the basis for this. (p13 u_m31)

In the discussion that ensued, five different writers echoed a sentiment that new technology might often be perpetually criticized for being detrimental, but at the end of the day, "the kids are all right" (p14 u_j06):

> To begin in medias res, in the 1780s, critics argued that exposure to sentimental novels was rotting the brains of young readers. In the 1810s, critics argued that exposure to Romantic literature was rotting the brains of young readers. In the 1860s, critics argued that exposure to photography was rotting the brains of young viewers. In the 1890s, critics argued that exposure to typewriters was rotting the brains of young workers. In the 1920s, critics argued that exposure to movies was rotting the brains of young viewers. In the 1950s, critics argued that exposure to television was rotting the brains of young viewers. In the 1980s, critics argued that use of computers (esp. video games) was rotting the brains of young users. Now in the 2010s, critics are arguing that use of I-phones, twitter, social networking, and God know what other technology is rotting the brains of young users. (p14 u_j06)

Overall, the general evaluation of newness in this selection of WPA-L threads is mixed, but participants evidence positive or neutral attitudes towards new technologies more often than they do negative attitudes.

The other important set of *doxa* dealing with newness have to do with how new texts and technologies can be viewed or framed within composition and rhetoric's traditional framework. In some cases, participants limited their work with new technologies to how they fit within and can help instruction of the heuristics and concepts of traditional rhetoric (audience analysis; *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*; rhetorical situations), taking a "nothing new under the sun" (p31 u_g08) approach to digital writing. This **new technology can be conceptualized by old rhetoric** perspective generally sublimated all texts to a stable set of classical principles, and claimed that digital texts are simply "new dogs" that are subject to the same "old tricks":

> I have been using digital composing as a way to provide students a new window on some of the more basic principles of rhetoric, argument, and persuasion. I like to call it teaching new dogs old tricks. The take-away from my courses, I hope, is the systematic thinking about message and audience before choosing the tool/medium. I also focus a great deal on writing systems-together, I hope that these focuses allow students to contextualize new media in meaningful ways. Then, with that larger context, they can drill down into specific technologies/tools/media. As of yet, I have not figured out a good way to teach that latter kind of course without its being so focused on learning a technology that the bigger picture stuff gets lost. (p52 u_w06)

Here rhetoric, argument, and persuasion are divisible from medium and tool; rhetoric is an abstract system that does not depend on particular literacy technologies. In its broadest form, new digital texts are best used for teaching about audience analysis (p3, p26) and "thinking through rhetorical situations" (p37 u_b11). Xtranormal isn't a new media text that can help users understand

principles like automation, modularity, and variability, but a text for learning "warrants, lines of argument, stasis questions, etc." (p3 u_m28).

This "new dogs, old tricks" *doxa* appeared among 13 different users. On the other hand, 33 of these WPA-L participants recognized (though there is no evidence in this sample of whether or not this perspective is manifested in their classrooms), that digital media and technologies resist traditional constructs and **demand a new rhetoric**. These participants framed "digital literacies" as different enough from print literacies to involve a "major overhaul" to how rhetoric is understood and taught; these literacies need "integrating" because they are considerably different from the traditional FYC curriculum (p6 u_j15). When technological contexts change, digital literacies and practices "shift, appear, disappear" (p53 u_a15). In one case, a discussion titled "Wikipedia on FYC," the participants wrestled with the unstable text. While some of these WPA-L users noted dissatisfaction with an article describing FYC and either question it or claim not to know where to start (p7 u_k11), others observed the fundamental shift that has occurred: "Don't complain about a Wikipedia entry. Just change it" (p7 u_m38). These texts create the opportunity for new models of composing, collective authorship, and publication. Such media are "radically new" and "take some adjustment in our thinking" (u_r06). Though sometimes treated basically as new genres (p9), these texts were also recognized as problematizing the "poet/scholar in the garett idea of writing" by relying on "other, newer processes" (p16 u_l02). Writing becomes "an open source project" (p24 u_j09)

and pushes back against norms and acceptance of plagiarism. As the following message argued, digital media create more than just new styles, but entire new ethics and understandings of what it means to participate with texts:

> We're in a new, fluid, digital age with a new context. Students view writing as open source code. They're not stealing or cheating, they're modifying existing work. There's a new ethic developing and we need to address that in our own pedagogy as well as in our instruction to students. When we adhere to what we were taught and use the rhetoric that was used on us, our students just don't get it. We end up frustrated and want to brand students as lazy, stupid, or malicious when in reality, we are no longer speaking the same language about plagiarism. It's a new frontier and that is quite frightening. (p35 u_j09)

Among the rarest things mentioned in this corpus, however, was the truly new text, something that "is not a video but does something that print clearly cannot" (p41 u_j12). Though this new rhetoric[26] is ill-defined and elusive, the texts that manifest the new rhetoric push against conventions and expectations about "the usual alphabetic text we teach-preach" (p54 u_w04). These discussions indicate that this iteration of the WPA-L community viewed digital media and texts as new—sometimes radically new—and though practitioners in the community often tried to conceptualize these texts according to the stable theoretical systems of composition and rhetoric, there was also a great deal of recognition in the community that the technology resists and complicates those systems.

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[26] Not to be confused with Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca's *The New Rhetoric* (1969) Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame P.

Empowering technology

The statement that technology can "resist" or "complicate" things reflects another important set of *doxa* in this corpus, all of which have to do with technology and agency. According to Joyce R. Walker and Byron Hawk's (2010) introduction to *Digital Tools in Composition Studies*, conversations about computers as writing tools have long "sustained the tendency to swing dramatically between work that assigns a significant agency to the machine (or more accurately the machine's software programs or user interface) and efforts to limit or deny the agency of digital tools" (pp. xi-xii). Though Walker and Hawk argued that composition's concern with agency has been giving way to inquiry that examines how tools, users, and contexts are integrated, it is clear from this analysis that agency-ascribing is still an important part of composition and rhetoric's rhetoric of technology. In fact, this analysis upholds their claim that there is a strong tendency in composition to "ascribe a high degree of autonomous agency to digital tools" (p. xii). **Technology is an agent** was the most commonly drawn-upon assumption about technology in Haas' analysis, and it was the third most frequent in this study. This perspective was closely followed by two related *doxa*: **students and teachers *have* personal agency with technology** and **students and teachers *need* personal agency with technology**, both of which are concerned with the power relationships that our tool uses are thought to be fraught with. How much control and technological ability humans have and whether or how much technology determines student

behavior (especially writing behavior) were both important issues to this group of WPA-L participants, and these beliefs were frequently grounds for their conversations on the mailing list.

Machine agents

As I have already noted, an especially controversial image of computer agency that occurred frequently in this corpus is the machine-as-reader. One thread, titled "Machine Scoring," wrestled with two issues: the expense and testing interests of institutions and corporations (u_d05), and a vision of students writing for computers rather than real audiences or teachers (p10 u_p05). Although the first response opened the discussion in terms of the economics and corporations, all but two of the 19 messages that followed it focused exclusively on technology as an agent. The majority of these reacted extremely negatively to the claim that "anyone using word-processing software is *already* writing and revising for and with a machine-reader" (u_d06), rejecting any ability of the machine to have the agency to process language or make meaning. Participants responded with a deep disdain for the idea of writing for a non-sentient reader; they "object[ed]" to "the word 'read' being used to describe what a machine does to anything other than computer language" (u_m38), and quite flatly denied the agency of the machine: "Exactly, They can't read" (u_c02). One reacted with deep

irony[27] about the whole situation: "Maybe we could just have computers write essays that other computers score. I think my Mac is college-ready" (u_m11). On the other hand, a series of participants compared the relationships students have with automatic scoring to extant relationships with grammar and spelling checkers, framing them as "useful and essentially do[ing] the same thing as e-rater" (u_l14). One writer brought in a perspective from her computer science students, which allows for a more balanced perception of machine-user agency:

> My computer sci majors explain that when they write code, they are communicating to a machine to tell it what to do. Some agency remains with the writers, though, in that case, which seems mighty different from writers' relationship to non-sentient scoring devices -- albeit ones programmed by sentient folks. Oh, the circuitry. (u_c09)

Another writer noted that other participants were surrounded by machine readers at that very moment—the word-processing and e-mail programs and databases that are not merely boxes in which to create text, but agency-holding machines that can "make instructive use" of texts. The very habit of attributing verbal action to machines surreptitiously attributes a great deal of agency to them. In p10 participants discussed how their computers and programs not only "make use of" text but also "guide other programs" and make "suggestions" (u_d06), they "guide," "evaluate," "check," and "say" things to students about their writing (u_p05). Two list users attempted to minimize this agency as much as

[27] These conversations predate Les Perelman's well-known 2012 nonsense essay, which received the highest possible grade from the Educational Testing Service's e-Rater (Mullis, 2012).

possible, noting that machines only encouraged superfluous and low-level behaviors (u_l14). Only one participant explicitly relied on the theoretical framework of posthumanism, encouraging a network notion of machines as "nonhuman actants" causing concessions (u_a13).

These participants' concern with lines between human and machine behavior seemed to be connected to their acceptance or rejection of machine agency. One example was in thread p16, which I discussed in an earlier section; without returning to this thread in great detail, participants in the discussion compared machine readers (in this case a translation app) and spelling and grammar checking software. As described earlier, these participants viewed software as having the potential to affect and even share in authorship. The notion that we react to technology as an agent, that it tells us what to do, was one of the beliefs that shaped p16 as well as other discussions. In p28, "The Ideal Writing Environment," one participant worries over ways that computers "affected my thinking and writing in ways that I have yet to fully understand" (p28 u_r16); others recognized (again with verbals) that technology "demands" things from us and "changes" us (p28 u_l04; u_m38), and that these changes might be "narrowing the range of human composition and thought" (u_m38). It has—as Plato argued so long ago—"made us forgetful" (p30 u_r16).

In p26, "Lebduska's The Facebook Mirror," a primary concern of participants was how Facebook has affected discourses and identities. Though "FB" could refer to the software, the corporation, the larger network of actants

participating in Facebook (which includes but is not limited to the software), or even the entire "techocraze" as cultural act (u_n01), it is clear that the program was often framed as complicit in how users described and debated the negative influence of technology. The subject of the thread was an *Inside Higher Ed* article by Lisa Lebduska that critiqued the now-common trope of "Facebook as bogeyman." Twelve of the 25 participants in this thread fundamentally agreed with her critique, rejecting Facebook as villain. In fact, none of the other users in this thread argued that Facebook is a problem[28]. Here, the technology was denied agency and problems were cited to be cultural or generational: the sense of entitlement arises from the generation rather than the technology (u_b11), and the writing space thus operates not an agent but a mirror (u_n01, u_l10). On the other hand, participants' framing of machines and software as villainous agents—"they can't be trusted" (p16 u_c25)—returned when WPA-L participants discussed ubiquitous cell phone technology. In p18, "Surveillance Creep," the common practice of ascribing independent action to technology continued: iPhones "know" where we are and how we use them, and they can participate as alibis and "clear your name" (p18 u_s10). Other users, more tentative in their ascription of agency to machines, put the onus of villainy on corporations: actions were ascribed to Apple and Google (u_r06) or "the schemes of marketers and

[28] This thread eventually shifts into a debate about the role of personal writing in composition courses, but that conversation only takes place in nine of the 49 messages in the thread.

manufacturers" (u_d19). There seems to be something of an implicit tug-of-war on this slice of the WPA-L over technology's status as an agent. In this corpus, 22 WPA-L users ascribed agency to technology (37 times over 14 threads); as the following section will describe, another 23 users framed students and teachers as agents (31 times over 15 threads). Though participants in these discussions were clearly concerned with agency, there seemed to be no consensus or general one-sidedness in this community about where that agency resides.

Human agents

Along with computers and software as agents, this group of WPA-L users also seemed to be concerned with the subject's agency, whether teachers or students. Partially an implicit recognition of technological determinism, 23 participants in these discussions praised situations where students and teachers had some form of agency with or as a result of a tool. This might be a skill students have adopted, such as the ability to search texts and information rapidly and effectively (p1), it may be a way students' and teachers' personal or professional lives have been improved (p26), or it might be a form of "beating the machine" (p10 u_p05). WPA-L participants also frequently made calls to enhance students' and professors' technological agency; one example of this line of thinking was the "digital divide" commonplace, which appeared seven times cooccurrent with or in close proximity to the 27 instances of that *doxa*. Both of these agency *doxa*, again, participate in empowering technology as an agent or

rejecting technology's empowered status; in either case, a complex critical or network theory of technology does not seem to be present.

Discussions relying on a belief in students' ability and agency with technology were widespread; these *doxa* appeared in 23 participants' messages, occurring 31 times over the course of 15 threads. Thirteen of the 31 occur in response to claims that technology is a dominant agent. When users described frustration with e-reader texts that destabilize pagination, interrupting the teacher's standard instructions to "turn to page 29," two counterarguments relied on agency: readers have the ability to search (p1 u_s16, u_m03, u_a02). Occasionally, participants had to be reminded of their own agency. For instance, users had the ability to edit and not simply complain about misrepresentation on *Wikipedia*: "all it takes is each one of us sitting down for a few minutes and sending in changes. A sentence here, a sentence there. Individual agency, remember?" (p7 u_r06). Blog software that allow for the basically simple establishment of agency are thought valuable because "students can actually choose their own tools and help each other learn how to use them" (p9 u_d12). The modifier "actually" seems somehow to intensify the user's appreciation of the simple tool's affordance. With their technologies, students can easily revise (p27), write (p16), and think in new ways and with "greater cognitive abilities" (p13); technologies enable students to be present where once they could not have been (p26). These users noted that when teachers make choices about technology, they also gain agency. In some cases, their agency was manifested in institutional

power/resistance: "we now have computerized writing classroom, and one thing we made sure of is not having 'extra' stations so that caps couldn't be raised" (p28 u_d18). In others cases, the power was curricular—such as reminders that professors can, indeed, customize and create new material in courseware that is often seen as too standardized (p37 u_c04). Good technology is that which enhances what humans can do—docile technology that users have power over.

Related to a recognition of "good" technologies that allow for or enhance agency were repeated discussions that reflect a common belief that writing teachers and their students need more agency. The **teachers and students need agency with technology** *doxa* appeared 27 times over the course of 14 threads though it was less widespread than other agency *doxa*, only coded among 16 users. Again, sometimes the technology was complicit as a counteragent: "technologies, becoming ever more widely available and ever easier to use, are not magic, and require users to develop competencies specifically related to their use" (p16 u_c25). So, if technology challenges student literacy, students need "solid and informed instruction" (p26 u_r06) as well as instructors literate enough in the technology to give them such instruction. Online learning is another topic that was accompanied by frequent calls for enhanced agency. Participants characterized online learning as having an inherent "isolation" (p33 u_d13, u_t11) and depersonalization: "writing courses require much more human interaction, and not all students find it easy to get that kind of information online" (p33 u_t11). Students need to be "technically savvy" as well as motivated and

responsible in order to succeed (p33 u_s10), and online teachers need to remember that it is false to "equate being able to own a computer and use FB with tech knowledge" (p33 u_d13). Thankfully, it seems that the "digital native" assumption that has long been prevalent in the media was not at all present in the WPA-L. In fact, a series of users displayed a concern for student agency being lost in the digital divide. In both cases when participants discussed computer labs and laptop carts being removed (p 28, p45), responses ranged from "saddened" (p25 u_a08) to "worried" (p45 u_w04) for the students ("poor kids," in one case) affected by the "classist" technological system (p28 u_r06).

Along with participants' essentially good desire to help students in a technological world, the **need agency** *doxa* sometimes emphasized technology as a mechanism for the instructor or WPA to gain agency both institutions and programs. Sometimes it was the institution or other technocratic body that threatens agency: "in other words, just as teachers choose their texts, we must retain the right to choose our online learning spaces" (p2 u_w04). Even something as simple choosing a certain kind of computer desk (or choosing not to let a computer lab space be changed into some other kind of learning space) can be a way to generate power—in the case of p28, power over enrollment sizes well beyond the NCTE and CCCC recommended levels (http://www.ncte.org/positions/classsize). The issue of class size, grading workload, and even administrative workload was also an issue of agency in these threads. P8 is a thread titled "How I Wish Technology Could Help Me Provide

Feedback"; the opening message listed eight ideal features of a program that would make teaching and administering easier, including a list of "frequent comments" to attach to student texts, direct links to digital textbooks, threaded commentary on documents, notification and statistical analysis systems, and the ability to not only run analytics on her own feedback but also create reports on other faculty. Here, a big technology (much like MyCompLab, a suite of programs that many WPA-L users describe negatively) was valuable when it was a mechanism that helps the WPA or instructor assess, gather, and administer data about courses, students, and programs more easily and effectively. There is an interesting irony here: big technology was to be feared when it surveys our personal lives (p18, "Surveillance creep"), yet such watching was important to some users' understanding of administration. Although this kind of panoptic dream feature was not often talked about by the more influential voices on the list, it did occur more than once, including discussion of class management systems with "Big-Brother capability" (p28 u_w07) to "deliver," "blank out," or "remotely control" student computers. Software became a method for forcing students to behave in certain ways: "Our management software provides a post-first option, which prevents piggy-backing with "me too" posts. Students actually have to articulate an independent idea--something some have never done before" (p33 u_m19). A minimal and perhaps common sort of intrusion into student agency in classroom situations, like configuring a room to allow the professor to "make sure students are staying on task and not checking Facebook or whatever"

(p18 u_s10), this sort of disciplining was a lauded function of administrative and teaching technology that shares more than a few similarities to the nearly universally-condemned location and data tracking behaviors of smart phones. For this group of users, at least, "good" tech is disciplining and disciplinary tech.

Using technology

Nearly all of these themes have pointed toward what was the most frequent technology *doxa* at work in this corpus: that **technology is an external apparatus to writing**, an augmentation to the writing act abstractly conceived of This doxa appeared 42 times over the course of 17 threads, in the messages of 31 different users (see Table 4.5) . As discussed earlier in this chapter, the "Writing horseshoe-of-horse-heading-east Technology" and "Korean student writing with Smart Phone produces idiomatic English" threads are both exemplary of a belief that writing can be abstractly theorized as a cognitive action rather than an embodied technological process imbricated with our language and inscription tools. For these WPA-L writers, writing-as-cognition is human, and writing technologies are merely machine add-ons to the human act. The instruments used are secondary, attendant to writing rather than a defining quality of it; this *doxa* is different from conceptions of *writing itself* as a literacy technology.

Writing technologies (digital or otherwise) are *something else* that simply layer a level of complexity or choice over the generalized writing act. Technology can be *used* to teach writing, broadly conceived, but does not necessarily change

the nature of writing or its process in a major way; neither does the idea behave as a conceptualization of writing that affects how we theorize, practice, and teach it. This attendant or instrumentalis*t doxa* affects how users on the WPA-L value and accept or reject technologies. The threads in this corpus can be characterized by an instrumentalist rhetoric of technology, digital writing, and new media.

The status update in Figure 5.1, a serendipitous example from my own social media stream that appeared around the time I began composing this section, is an example of an instrumentalist rhetoric of digital writing and new media in action.

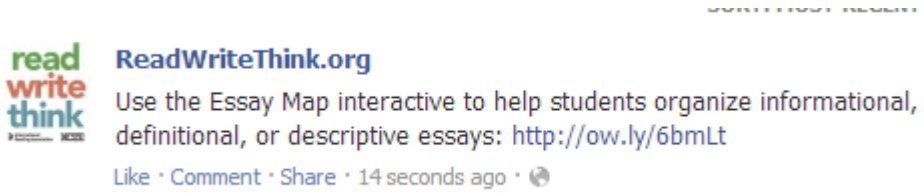

Figure 5.1 Facebook Status from ReadWriteThink.org

Of course, at face value there is *nothing wrong* with the notion of using interactive visualization tools to help students organize ideas as they build essays and other writing projects. At the same time, the essay—here named in a very modes-based pedagogy fashion as "informational, definitional, or descriptive"—is the product. And in the case of this tool, the essay that students are interactively prompted to create is simply the five-paragraph theme genre/format. Though learning such a structure has its merits, the structure-as-product has also been widely critiqued. The real goal of the interactive "Essay Map" is still traditional and narrowly-

defined essayistic literacy, and though I cannot at all argue that such a literacy is simply a *bad* thing to have or that this tool is wrong to promote it or that ReadWriteThink is wrong to share it, this update—along with many of the participants on the WPA-L—still participates in and reifies the "narrowly-defined means" of a composition and rhetoric that has long been described as conservative (Sirc, 2002, p. 36). Despite a veneer of digiality, seen in users' frequent posting about new digital tools they and their students use to create, the digital still seemed to be attendant to essayistic literacy. Technology is a good help, but it also remains an instrument, wed to a container disposition toward writing. Technology is a relatively minor issue; as one user remarked: "I don't see the introduction of technology into a program as any different than introducing a new textbook or a new approach to assignments" (p37 u_b11). Tools are about improving writing or improving the teaching of writing, but not changing it in any way.

A very practical example of this digital/essayistic distinction can be seen in p12, "Podcasts and Writing Instruction." In this discussion podcasts operated both as tools used to teach about writing and tools that could be the object of communication instruction itself. The opening message asked about "the use of podcasts in writing instruction" (u_p04). Two responses framed the podcast as an instructional step toward an essayistic product. One user shared references about multimodal invention, while another framed the podcast as a mode of instruction—a way for online teachers to deliver content. One other mentioned

instructional podcasts from Pearson. Three responses, on the other hand, interpreted the question differently, pointing toward podcasts as the product, the text to be composed. One shared references for developing podcast rubrics, and two others shared resources and scholars doing work in both written and audio media. In this conversation, there was no debate over whether podcasts "count" as something to be taught in a writing course, but telling is that the only time the original poster made public thanks on the thread was to the user who posted about Pearson's instructional resources. To all appearances, the podcast-as-textbook seems to have been the goal of her query, rather than the podcast-as-product. For this user, podcasting was a valid instrument for sharing the teacher's ideas, but not the object of interest itself.

As described in the first part of this chapter, WPA-L participants seem to value technology according to how they define language and writing—that is, how (or what) it augments when it augments writing. In the p16 and p17 discussion about the Korean student's use of Google Translate to compose his essays, the participants' postings about the augmentative relationship between writer and technology were a large part of their position on the technology's appropriateness. When, as described earlier, writing was described in terms of performance rather than cognition (of the body rather than of the mind), the technology was permissible and even ideal. The following position was common:

> Adaptive technologies that allow disabled students to record their work and have it written by the computer program would, in my view, meet the terms of the assignment. (p16 u_k11)

On the other hand, when users argued that foreign language learners are learning the rules and conventions of the second language itself in the writing classroom, they argued against using such technologies because they unfairly augment the mind. Because "learning writing" is learning language at a cognitive level, the technology is a problematic augmentation. One user compared it to cheating:

> If your course (as is the case with most FYW courses) is designed to teach students to write in English, then he didn't meet the terms of the assignment (parallel to if a student in a French composition class wrote his piece in English, and hired a French speaker to translate it). (p16 u_k11)

Where "knowledge" of the language resides seems to have been at question—language knowledge for this user was cognitive rather than technological, and so technology disrupts real language learning.

Much less common is evidence of users' reconceptualization of the relationship between writer and their knowledge. As one participant remarked:

> our assumptions as readers also must change, as we grow to assume that the English we read may not so much reveal the language learning of the writer, as that person's "competence" augmented by the capabilities of the software. (p16 u_c25)

In other words, to truly value and adapt to the technological change, our very assumptions about what language—or writing—competence implies must change.

In this sample of the WPA-L technology is secondary, an external apparatus to teaching and writing. "Good" technology doesn't change cognitive

relationships and doesn't upset traditional understandings of texts and writers. The belief that technology makes things easier, more efficient, and more effective often accompanied this thinking; an ease-logic was connected to the WPA-L's instrumentalist rhetoric of technology. WPA-L participants praised digital writing technologies for making writing easier, and described how they use digital writing technologies to help themselves in their various roles as teachers and administrators to resolve inefficiencies in instruction models. As noted earlier, there is a hint of irony in this point—using technology to help alleviate inefficiencies in instruction and administration is an end that WPA-L users critiqued corporations and universities for, and at the same time it is a value that they themselves held. Big educational technology such as MyCompLab was *valuable* when WPAs could use it to do their job of assessment, data-gathering, and administration more easily and effectively, but the same technology was to be *feared* or *reviled* when promulgated by similarly technocratic external groups (university administrators, learning technology consultants) because it introduces too much standardization (the standardization necessary to increase efficiency in assessment) and may affect labor practices, with the fearful image of computers and online tutors (underpaid and unprofessionalized) replacing instructors and contingent teaching staff.

A series of scholars in composition and technical communication have critiqued **ease** as one of the more ideologically loaded and problematic values in computing and electronic communication. Bradley Dilger (2008) defined ease as

"rapid learning, comfort in use, and high usability. Ease means refusing to see the code: preferring a simple, pragmatic approach which doesn't involve the complication of complete understanding" (p. 109). Because users don't "do" technology or don't perceive themselves as techno-savvy, they demand ease, a demand that is now a "part of our cultural understanding of the role of technology in our lives" (Dilger, 2008, p. 109). Both Dilger (2006, 2008) and Johnson (1998) have argued that an ethic of ease actually hampers end-user agency, that it is a machine ideology similar to Katz's "ethic of expediency"(2004) that "limits the visibility of technology and technological institutions, encouraging the belief that technology is autonomous, practically or empirically beyond our capability and control" (Dilger, 2006, p. 47). Dilger even went so far as to suggest that demands for ease, based as they are on literate models rather than electrate models, are "keeping the web and computing tied to print oriented epistemology" (2008, p. 124). Comments on the WPA-L about how digital texts ought to be stable and "well-behaved" like print texts for the purpose of academic citation come to mind.

More specifically to the concerns of this study, Dilger has connected the high value placed on ease to the managerial logic of the current-traditional approach to composition. He identified four commonplaces in this thinking: "students should find writing easy," "teachers should find teaching writing easy," "students should produce prose which is easy to read," and "writing is the

gatekeeper to the life of ease" (2006, p. 114). The first two of these are most relevant to this study.

The first is pedagogical: students should find writing easy. This commonplace is pragmatic. Humans tend to disengage from things that don't produce immediate rewards. In its most pejorative sense, the pedagogy of ease is that we have to make it easy (pleasurable) for our students because they refuse discipline. Less pejoratively, this notion implies that things that are easier to do are better. So, as one participant on the WPA-L noted, "Revising with a word-processing program is significantly easier than it is to revise with words painted on a wall, and while it is not quite so bad to revise with pencil and pen, I still think most of us would take the wordprocessor" (p30 u_s10). At least 17 times in assorted threads, the "it's easy to use" value occurred explicitly with regard to technologies that might be used in the classroom to help teach writing: if students find a technology easy to use, they will use it. Software like Blogger or web applications like Xtranormal were called valuable because students could just start them up and generate text with them without much extra assistance from the professor. Grammar and spell-checks were also cited (pd10) as good because they make writing easier—or at least less prohibitively difficult—for writers. In other cases, tools such as digital pens were considered useless because they are not easy to work with: "neither my tutors nor I can figure out how to use them effectively" (p42 u_d15).

The second ease commonplace in a managerial approach to writing instruction has to do with teachers, that they should find teaching writing easy. In the case of blogs, they were valuable for WPA-L users not only because they are easy to use, but because they are easy to teach with, so much so that the students might instruct one another. The other major appearance of ease logic had to do with making grading easier, with administrative uses of tech (p 8, p 55). In this case, technology was not a digital writing issue for the student, but an administrative apparatus for the teacher. Technology doesn't change what writing is done in class. We want advanced apps to make writing instruction easier and better, and incorporate video, voice, and other solutions as we compose our responses to students and do our work, but these technologies don't change how our students work and what they can do.

For many of the scholars cited above, the problem with systems and entire philosophies of technology that primarily value ease is that the end-user's agency is potentially weakened (ironic, concerning how many WPA-L users are concerned with enhancing student and teacher agency). Ease encourages a kind of technological determinism that places technology in a position of empowerment (it needs to be made easier because it is too difficult) at the same time that it downplays human involvement its workings (it needs to work by itself so I don't have to mess with it). A now out-of-date example is the VCR: nobody could ever seem to figure out how to program the stupid things. "In the easy view, technology is a natural force, like weather, which we embrace if

pleasant, but grudgingly tolerate otherwise" (Dilger, 2008, p. 117). In either case, it is beyond our understanding, so we claim not to really need to understand it in the first place.

As evidenced by the *doxa* described in this chapter, it seems that participants in this selection of the WPA-L considered technology and digital writing to be an important—if not central—part of what composition and rhetoric does or needs to think about. This perspective was complicated by deterministic and ease-focused understandings of technology. Digital composing technologies affect composing and social/cultural relationships, but at the same time users disregarded some of the more far-reaching implications of digital composing technologies for the writing classroom. Much like in Yancey's discussion in "Composition in a New Key" (currently nearly ten years old), this group of WPA-L users seemed to *do* digital literacy and technology themselves, but don't seem to work it in to what their students do. Users here are not Luddites; rather, these "regular folks" of the discipline (educators, administrators, and researchers at somewhat of a remove from apex discourses on composition and computers or digital writing and rhetorics) are engaged in a writing program ideology that's focused on writing as served by but not necessarily changed by digital technologies.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

> I am worried that our commitment to a particular conception
> of what it means to teach—a way of seeing, a terministic screen, to use Burke's terms—
> has made it difficult to discover how technology might change
> what we try to accomplish and how we accomplish it.
> (Palmquist, 2005, p. 99)

> Habits of mind can be difficult to change.
> (Ede, 2004, p. 183)

> It is reassuring to realize that the quiet e-mail message,
> magnified through the use of LISTSERV,
> continues to dominate academic discourse,
> staying the course after nearly 20 years of service
> (Hyman, 2003, p. 23)

Chapter 1 of this dissertation ended by considering three ideas: identification, eavesdropping, and performing a listening rhetoric. These concepts informed my theoretical approach to rhetoric and language, framed my methodology and goals for analysis, and also helped me describe the significance of this smaller study for thinking about technorhetorics in composition and rhetoric.

First, **identification**. As Burke has conceived it, humans reach consensus about reality by aligning themselves with certain symbols rather than other symbols to such an extent that they become unconscious of the entire process of reaching consensus because our attention has been so fully directed by our terministic screens that alternate realities disappear. Identification relies on common terms, common logics, and common beliefs and *doxa* to put the world together—participants in a discourse identify more or less closely with particular agents depending on how motives have been interpreted and presented by others in a rhetorical situation, but more importantly, those interpretations and

presentations are affected by entire communities and the worldviews that they embody in and through texts they produce. Thus, texts include ways of thinking, not simply telling ideology, but making it, displaying "the whole host of social systems and structures" in their materiality (Stillar, 1998, p. 6).

Second, **eavesdropping**. Whether working analytically or productively, the rhetor ought not only to speak, but to listen—rhetorical listening is working from a "stance of openness" to discourses (Ratcliffe, 2005, p. 17), a stance that allows for creating new identifications as well as revising troubled identifications (p. 19). We ought not only to listen to discourses produced by others—listening in cross-cultural communication, for example—as well as to discourses we ourselves produce. As rhetoric and critical theory scholars have often pointed out, part of living in the late 20th and early 21st centuries is developing the ability to be reflexive and identify problematic naturalized discourses in ourselves, especially as technology accelerates the pace of our lives and our discourses (Alexander & Rhodes, 2010; Nakayama & Krizek, 2010). The ability to self-analyze and proceed with what Ratcliffe has called an "accountability logic" (2005, p. 26) is an important method for making our way toward ethical conduct (p. 171). The image of the eavesdropper, then, standing quietly beside discourse and overhearing it in order to learn first before speaking, is a compelling figure for the critical rhetorician. Because the rhetorical critic does so much building out of fragments, creating a reality just as he or she analyzes a textually-constructed world, approaching discourse *emically*, from a listen-first position, is an ethical

way to enter description as well as criticism. Only after listening can the critic attempt to hold others accountable for their terministic screens, if this is his goal. Though making the WPA-L community accountable for their rhetoric was not a goal of my analysis, attempting to describe it was. In either case, proceeding from a listening stance that took the WPA-L participants on their own terms was among the most important steps.

Finally, **listening rhetoric.** Wayne Booth's (2004) *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric* placed listening to others as well as one's self at the center of resolving misunderstanding and conflict. Though such understanding doesn't lead to consensus, it does provide rhetors and communities opportunities to discover common *topoi*—and in this case *doxa*—that can be positions from which disagreement can be probed and even resolved (2004, p. 50). In attempting to understand commonplaces, *doxa*, and ideological positions on the WPA-L and in composition and rhetoric, proceeding from the listening-rhetoric teleology is a reasonable and ethical starting place for talking about change. In this dissertation, I have wrestled with the balance between two activities: description-as-listening, and critique-as-eavesdropping. In order to critique, I must describe; but the description itself was initially motivated by a desire to critique. Thus the project's emphasis on a certain amount of authorial revelation and reflexivity; both of these provided opportunities for myself and the reader (scholars and participants in the very discourses I am interrogating) to:

> recognize the extent to which ideologies of disciplinarity and professionalism may encourage us to *need*, say, to develop our critique in ways that "perfect" our argument in terms of disciplinary norms but cause us to ignore such issues as the problem of speaking for others. (Ede, 2004, p. 183)

Though reflexive methods and habits of mind are not perfect remedies for overapplying theory and undermining our own ideological commitments as scholars, these methods of keeping in mind the humans who make the texts we analyze help researchers—myself—to mitigate attempts to make the picture too big and offer overbroad, too-sweeping claims. Still, the text analyzed here is *real*; it exists, is analyzable, and clearly was informed by and informs ideology. In fact, our own individual and local situations make these texts even more powerful, as they resonate with (or against) our own experiences. Recognizing and wrestling with the implications of those experiences for research is an important part of making an analytical, eavesdropping, listening rhetoric into an *ethical* productive rhetoric. There is not only the matter of listening ethically, as I have tried to describe in previous chapters, but listening productively, as I deal with here.

Conclusions: Instrumentalism, docile technologies, and the WPA-L

What doxastic conceptions and philosophies of technology do WPA-L participants ascribe to? Most commonly, discourse of the participants on the WPA-L that participated in these particular threads were guided by an instrumentalist (but not technological) conception of writing—that there is something else apart from writing that makes writing. Thus, when talking about

writing, many members of the WPA-L community engaged in a complex minimization of technology, both constructing it as something extraneous, optional, and non-determinative to the "real" work of composition and rhetoric and yet also figuring it deterministically as something that potentially intrudes upon and disrupts the agency of students and teachers. These writers used an array of digital composing tools in their work and with their students, but these tools were used to reify traditional rhetorics and academic textual ecologies and don't often seem to transform how community members see or think about writing. Docile technologies that don't intrude on a professor's agency or theories of composing and cognition were praiseworthy, especially when they make writing and the managerial tasks of the teacher-administrator easier, more efficient, and thus more effective. Of course, there were important exceptions in the community to these generalizations; to construct a monolith out of the WPA-L would be fallacious and unjust. However, taken overall, the text as a whole evidenced a relatively clear community consciousness about digital composing technologies among those participants who engaged most regularly in dialoguing about those technologies.

In *The Function of Theory in Composition Studies,* Raúl Sánchez (2002) claimed that the instrumentalist disposition is an "implicit theory" characterizing composition. He described it as "the same one that underwrites the writing done in most literature courses: that writing is a device by which a nondiscursive subject conveys 'thoughts' or similarly interiorized constructs" (p. 68). Sánchez 's

specific target in that text was Berlin's cultural theory, which he argued has often affected the understood goals of writing taught in classrooms but fails in that it has had little influence on how writing itself is understood. Though that dimension of his argument is sidereal to the purposes of this dissertation, I think Sánchez 's assessment of composition being stuck on representations rather than the act of representation is a useful way of thinking about the container disposition I have described on the WPA-L, and how that instrumentalist position may be problematic today:

> When, in the study of writing, basic questions focus not on meanings conveyed in or through or by acts of writing but on connections (re)made among and across endlessly generated (f)acts of writing, then the idea that there is something else apart from writing, driving writing, becomes suspect. In fact, it becomes possible to consider that the very notion of something else, regardless of how it manifests in particular instances, is itself a function of writing. The idea of something else, the idea of meaning, even the idea of 'the idea,' turn out to be structural functions of the (f)act of writing rather than metaphysical, philosophical, or even merely theoretical concepts. (Sánchez, 2005, p. 96)

Sánchez ' point is closely connected to the problem I identify in the first part of Chapter 5: participants on the WPA-L—especially among those participants who posted to the list with the greatest frequency—worked from a conception of writing as the result of cognition, where ideas are the "something else driving writing" and technology—in some cases *any* writing technology—is an afterthought, a choice for delivery rather than a material-cognitive-technological process wherein ideas are the result of rather than the means of composition.

Related to the purely cognitive view of writing was a certainly ethical but sometimes distracting emphasis on agency and technological disruptions of agency. Although we cannot deny the ethical impetus to enhance the technological agency of writers falling on the wrong side of the digital divide, allowing how technology interrupts human agency to be the primary factor in rhetorical and pragmatic assessments of technology is problematic, because such assessments tended to inspire and lead to "negative effects of technologies" arguments. These conversations were rooted in and too concerned with determinism and a deterministic theory of technology, a substantive theory of technology (Feenberg, 2002, p. 6) that attributes too much autonomous cultural force to technology that can be just as philosophically destructive as instrumentalist and neutral arguments about technology (p. 83).

Claimed often in the literature and explored more closely in this study, there is a break in composition—one perceivable on the WPA-L in 2011—between techno-centric discourses of computers and composition and the often a-technological discourses of composition and rhetoric. As Porter (2007) has pointed out, an interest in digital composing, though clearly growing and thriving throughout this first part of the 21st century, is still relegated to the sub-specialty of the computers and tech folk. A "tech person" in the department is certainly useful and important, but the notion that every person who teaches and researches writing and literacy is by default a "tech person" and should instruct digital rhetorics and composing is far from the center of how the WPA-L

understands and presents itself. Despite the high rhetoric of early hypertext prophets, the consistent claims and provocative arguments and research of leaders and scholars in both mainstream composition-rhetoric and computers and writing, and the steady transformation of genres, purposes, rhetorics, and entire networks of writing in the 21st century, according to this analysis the rhetoric of technology of this set of WPA-L participants was limited. In terms of the scheme created in Chapter 2, participants in this discourse community seemed rarely to be techno-enthusiasts and certainly never Luddites, but the unfocused, erratic way the WPA-L dealt with technology also made it impossible to place most of these participants in the technologically-sensitive and institutionally valuable position of techno-critic.

At the same time, the WPA-L is not the whole of composition instruction in the United States. *The Impact of Digital Tools on Student Writing and How Writing is Taught in Schools*, a 2013 Pew Research Center study performed in concert with the National Writing Project (NWP), surveyed 2,462 Advanced Placement and NWP teachers in order to describe these teachers' attitudes toward and practices with digital tools (Purcell, Buchanan, & Friedrich, 2013). Researchers found that these teachers viewed the Internet and digital technologies in a positive light, beneficially affecting students' ability to collaborate and write creatively to real audiences and creating a "greater investment among students in what they write and greater engagement in the writing process" (p. 2). Though they reported some downsides about writing in a digital age (p. 11), these

teachers used a variety of digital tools to deliver instruction. Fifty percent of surveyed teachers reported that digital tools make writing instruction easier (p. 5), a point that echoes my own analysis. But beyond issues of delivery, these teachers also described ways their students use digital tools in school work. For example, 40% of teachers surveyed reported that their students shared work on wikis, websites, and blogs, while 29% used collaborative web-based writing tools like GoogleDocs to have students edit each other's work (p. 6). On top of all the other writing reported, 78% of these teachers assigned multimedia or mixed media work to their students (p. 6). Majorities of these teachers (75%) spent time discussing intellectual property in terms of fair use and copyright along with more the traditional topics of citation and plagiarism (p. 5).

Though the Pew researchers noted that these findings aren't representative of all teachers, since the sample was mostly populated by teachers working with academically successful students in AP and other advanced courses, these findings still offer an important counternarrative to some of the less technologically-advanced themes that my own research narrative constructs. The WPA-L isn't every teacher everywhere, and there obviously are a range of technological practices and *doxa* that my sample didn't include. Further research along these lines can help to provide a fuller, messier, and more complex perspective on this important matter.

I don't wish to oversimplify scholarly projects and local practices by dichotomizing the wide array of positions on technology into a few concrete

groups: Luddites and enthusiasts, compositionists against computers and compositionists that seem to live inside them. Porter's (2007) dichotomy has the limitations of any binary. Resolving anything into two camps is rhetorically useful, but not necessarily accurate to how members of a community are actually networked around an issue, as the variety of approaches to new rhetorics or technology and the discipline that I have described in this analysis made clear. At the same time, it is important for critical researchers to call attention to places where the discipline's theories and practices are interacting in confusing or even contradictory ways. In the case of this analysis of the WPA-L, this contradiction is in part being committed to deterministic and antideterministic theories of technology at the same time, and in part it is being committed to and aware of digital writing in our own ecologies but not in the writing of our students.

Though there is a commitment to big ideas, using computers, new media, and digital composition in writing instruction, other parts of the discussion on the WPA-L seemed to fumble. While I cannot argue that WPA-L should be all about technology all the time, and that every communication about a digital technology should be treated with high seriousness and engage with critical philosophies of technology, conversations about digital composting technologies on the list were off-handed and generally skimmed the surface of the implications of recent and widespread material and technological changes. These WPA-L users remained committed to teaching papers and did not seem to be especially interested in the implications of digital writing. Similarly to Mike Palmquist

(2005) in "Information Technology as Other: Reflections on a Useful Problem," I can't and don't wish to discount our field's widespread adoption of and thinking about the use of digital tools. I do, on the other hand, share his concern: "that as designers of writing curricula we seem to regard the integration of important technological tools in our syllabi and lesson plans as an extracurricular activity" (p. 97). In 2005, Palmquist saw composition teaching existing in a "transitional stage" (p. 99), where the same old thing was being done with new toys—that new technologies are simply being used to slightly update earlier teaching/learning practices. Textbooks moved online, but didn't change other than to grow, he argues. Teaching moved online, but only in ways analogous (through CMSes) to classrooms. Later in the same volume, Kemp argues in "Computers, Innovation, and Resistance" that "the professional trained scholars—in many cases the WPAs—are saying one thing and many of those who actually doing the teaching in the classrooms are defaulting to current-traditional instruction" (2005b, p. 105). The problem isn't really a failure of theory but rather a problem of the commonplace, of administration and the lived-into values of the teachers.

My concern as a result of this analysis is the instrumentalist, ease-dictated understanding of digital writing technology I have observed among this community of WPA-L users means that this group has *continued to remain static in a transitional stage without ever actually transitioning.* Though this account isn't generalizable to other communities and the discipline at large, it at the same times is a familiar position in composition and rhetoric. This group doesn't deny

technological change, or even resist it; but neither do they engage it in the most forward-looking or useful ways. This type of engagement is not necessarily wrong, but it is problematic—especially because the rhetoric of the WPA-L *is* influential and is *seen as* representative of the larger WPA and composition and rhetoric community (even if it is not empirically so).

These conversations—this analysis—are valuable in part because of the high level of importance the WPA-L community places on its online interactions. LISTSERV and mailing lists have long been important sites of disciplinary articulation, invention, correspondence, and even reputation-building for academics (Cubbison, 1999; Hyman, 2003; Matzat, 2004, 2009). One of the threads collected in this corpus, in fact, celebrated the anniversary of the WPA-L. Nearly exclusively, this lengthy thread presented participants' attitudes about the list itself as a disciplinary text. In posts distributed among a very large group of posters (unusual for other long threads, which tend to be extended conversations between a small group of users), the "Happy Birthday WPA-L" thread (p19) defined the group's sense of value. For participants, the list creates and sustains a sense of community at the same time that it creates a relatively coherent set of ideas and identifications for geographically distant and socially disparate members of the field of composition and rhetoric.

The WPA-L is an important social and professional network to its users, not just a valuable communication space, but a "profound force in our field" (p19 u_d09) and even a "Force For Good in an uncertain world" (u_c16). Users valued

the WPA-L as a source for ideas about contemporary issues, assistance for teachers and administrators working in isolation (u_k04, u_w04), and resources for "enriching" (u_m36) teaching, administration, and scholarship (u_j06). Implicit in the regular requests for sources, recommendations, and lines of argument for new faculty positions can be seen a high esteem for the community's collective knowledge and ethos. The list is a space for "invaluable resources and a sense of connection" for newcomers (u_g06). At least one poster specifically noted that the WPA-L has literally saved careers (u_c16), and many others described the list's concrete institutional influence to shape, create, rescue, and even unmake university departments (u_c16, u_b09). While two participants idealized list discussions as extensions of the graduate classroom (u_r19, u_k04), that all-important space for professionalization and disciplining, others saw the list as itself representative of the entire field of composition and rhetoric:

> WPA-L has made possible the formation of a network that has helped shaped my professional identity, allowed me to look outward to the larger field on a daily basis and tap into the conversations on issues in their nascent forms before they got to the journals. (u_j16)

For its users, the WPA-L has *specific*, *concrete*, and *legitimate* institutional power in the academy as well as in composition and rhetoric.

WPA-L discussions are, in fact, seen by its members as valuable enough to the discipline of composition and rhetoric that some of them have been republished: structured, annotated, extended, and publicly archived on Haswell's

and Blalock's inventory and resource site, *CompPile* (2013a), most prominently as raw material for *CompFAQs* (2013b). In the process, these seemingly ephemeral e-mails become disciplinary artifacts that are passed on for posterity: semi-official resolutions, bibliographies, thought pieces, and FAQ-style *answers* to the big, recurring questions of the field. As it is republished in this way, the WPA-L is moved beyond the boundaries of the list as it exists in inboxes and its archives at http://lists.asu.edu and becomes a substantial source of fixed lore; not simply the kind vetted because it comes from an expert teacher with ethos in their local institution who has passed it on in faculty development, but lore approved and published by members of the discipline. In being added to the online composition and rhetoric anthologies that are *CompPile* and *CompFAQs*, the WPA-L text is framed as representative of good disciplinary thinking and as a result potentially becomes even more influential.

Currently, on *CompFAQs'* front page is the list of main categories, 17 of which are specifically described as having begun life as messages on the WPA-L. On further exploration of the site, however, composition faculty and researchers will find *many* other pages from the WPA-L alongside pages written by Haswell, annotated bibliographies created by a wide range of composition and rhetoric scholars, Tables of Contents and Suggested Readings from assorted published collections, and pages created by graduate classes as course projects. A casual search using the site's engine brought 68 different pages that mention or are based on posts from the WPA-L. I can't and don't wish to argue that the WPA-L is

the center of composition, but such a position is impossible to claim by any single group or individual scholar. However, the WPA-L is positioned as a highly significant generative, interactive, and rhetorical space for the discipline—not only by its users, but by the array of texts created as a result of those users' interactions. Though the WPA-L does not define the discipline, it does engage in discipline-defining for a large audience, and has done so for many years[29].

Without overstating the importance of composition in the American university, because composition and rhetoric has long been deeply imbricated in the managerial, normalizing, and disciplining functions of the university (Alexander & Rhodes, 2010; Berlin, 1984; Crowley, 2009; Dobrin, 2011a), and because composition is among the most-taught gatekeeper courses in the modern academy, our operating assumptions are important and influential—not only to ourselves, but to those outside of our discipline. In these many, many classes, the institution's ideology is worked out, reified, and passed on (even if instructors themselves may have limited agency in affecting those ideologies in other ways). And it's passed on to a lot of people—students, our own faculty, and the faculty whose programs our courses serve. If our big ideas, advanced thinking about, and new practices for 21st century technologies, writing, and digital tools are to be influential, would it not make sense to put those ideas into play in the places

[29] I cannot resist pointing out an extra irony here—all of this traditionalist, disciplining republication takes place in a medium that has long been conceived of by many members of academic fields as rampantly undisciplined. CompFAQs is a wiki.

where these ideas and practices can affect and be passed on by the greatest number of people? This dissertation projects that digital writing and technology are something that composition and rhetoric attends to in its scholarship and in our own writing and creative practices, but that this attention may not be found in our rhetorics of technology and reflection over teaching practices. Future research in this vein could point to larger trends, offer more complex narratives, or even contradict this projection entirely.

Apex discourses that wrestle more systematically with computers and digital writing, and the thinking that goes along with those discourses, are underrepresented in the commonplaces of the field's discourse about technology. Most of my colleagues see computers as glorified typewriters and use them as such. And talk about them as such. If, however, we work from the assumption—as I do and as the techno-enthusiasts and -critics presented in Chapters 1 and 2 do—that digital writing is a pedagogically, culturally, and socially valuable thing to embrace as we design writing instruction in the university, it is clear that such underutilization is unhelpful. From the context of this study, Christina Haas' conclusion is still true: "As long as technological theory and practice are guided, even determined, by a discourse in which technology is an agent then the role of scholars and teachers, especially in the humanities, will be minimal" (p. 199). In a culture where digital computing technology is integrated with so much of the important social, economic, and humanistic composing that we do, a minimal role

for composition and rhetoric in the conversation—and in the decisions that result from them—becomes an irrelevant role.

Our language still needs to be remade.

Implications for composition discourse and research

This dissertation points out that a large part of the problem is habits of mind; entrenched ways of thinking that come out of our own experiences as well as the ways we have been disciplined into composition. While habits of mind can be hard to change, as Ede (2004) pointed out, entering other *doxa* into the conversation is a way to either transform old lines of thought or invent new ones. One implication of my analysis, then, is for digital composing advocates, experts, and practitioners to continue to participate in these sorts of mainstream non-tech forums. Many times, I've heard in various social networks that someone is "finally done" with the WPA-L. Though such departures have on occasion been over user's abundant but innocuous outrage over bedbugs in conference hotels, more often they were inspired by frustrating, seemingly backwards thinking about technology on the list. Balkanization, however, is not always the most helpful response to dissensus. Techno-enthusiasts and –critics need to participate in these forums alongside more conservative adopters; though minds may not be changed on the list, these messages have clear, often unspoken influence on unknown numbers of compositionists. Participating in the WPA-L's constitution

of its disciplinary self is a meaningful and potentially suasive course of action for digital compositionists. Participants in the discourses of computers and composition and computers and writing must continue to frame the WPA as a technorhetorician and try to exemplify and be a resource for digital writing practice—as some members of the list continue to do.

We must continue to claim that technology is a part of composition's purview. Porter (2007) claimed that "given how writing happens in the 21st century, *all* composition research needs to be computers and writing research (p. xii). This shift in emphasis should be true of our instruction as well as our discourse. Pamela Takayoshi and Brian Huot (2003) have argued that the kind of examination this dissertation engages in is incredibly important to writing pedagogy:

> Examining our assumptions and beliefs about teaching, language, literacy, and technology helps us guard against practices based upon beliefs and assumptions that are irrelevant to or in conflict with what we currently know about the teaching of writing. (p. 5)

We also should not think of composition in isolation—the discipline exists in a network of other academic areas and disciplines: history, chemistry, agriculture, computer sciences. We participate in developing online instruction, work on institutional technology committees, and make everyday decisions about computing technologies in our individual institutions and contexts. This discourse, the thinking it exemplifies and thus the practices it manifests is important. Our rhetorics of technology matter.

Critics of mainstream composition should resist bold dichotomies about huge gaps in composition's understanding of technology. Though there is clearly a distinction to be made, and clearly a sense among many in the discipline that technology isn't "what we do," to frame composition as a-technological Luddites is unfair. On the other hand, it is clear that there are constructions of technology at work in the discipline that must be understood, challenged, and remade in order to employ new media and digital technologies pedagogically as well as professionally. Rhetorical analysis—ever more complex as the 21st century progresses, is a valuable and important method both for graphing ideological claims and thus checking our critiques and for eavesdropping on the discipline at large as we engage in those critiques. Metadisciplinary rhetorical analysis takes part in a tradition of works in composition and rhetoric that:

> take a broad, encompassing look at ourselves in an effort to help us consciously build a discipline devoted to generating knowledge about writing and writing instruction and to making the local, regional, and national communities that sustain it more equitable places to live. (Massey & Gebhardt, 2011, p. 5)

Future research

This dissertation is a description and method of analysis that can clearly be extended. Looking at other texts in composition and rhetoric's extensive "scribal culture" (North, 1987, p. 5) has long been and should continue to be a way of reflecting, making sense of ourselves, and improving our practice. This kind of reflexiveness is an important part of the metadisciplinary research that often characterizes work in composition and rhetoric (Massey & Gebhardt, 2011).

Continued rhetorical and content analysis in and of composition is important because much can be learned from others of our "everyday texts." Future research should begin by taking stock of slices of WPA-L discourse from other years, which would provide an important opportunity for triangulating the findings described here. Such an analysis could be tied to key dates or publications in the field (2011 is right after the publication of *Digital Writing Matters*; would an analysis of 2005, directly following Yancey's 2004 CCCCs address about writing in the 21st century, make similar connections?), and could begin to examine the influence of publications and addresses on WPA-L discourse and rhetorics of technology. Over 25 years of LISTSERV discourse provides a rich set of data for analyzing the community's contribution to composition and rhetoric's lore. Studying samples from other years would extend and usefully complicate the findings presented here.

One of the limits of rhetorical analysis is that it can only offer a partial description of reality—the critic can only talk about what the texts say, and though texts might be action from a Burkean perspective, they may not necessarily accurately reflect teaching and research practice. Some of this study's findings point toward a potential gap between WPA-L participants' own use of digital tools and their descriptions of how those tools are used in their writing classes. A more complete picture of this potential gap could be gained through surveying and interviewing participants in this discourse; though the Carbone and Pew studies point to some potential gaps, more specific study of teaching

tools and practices in the WPA-L community would be revelatory. And certainly more broadly focused rhetorical analyses could examine how LISTSERV discussions develop, transform, and eventually die. This site also provides the opportunity to examine agency, evidence, and argumentation in online communities, all important lines of inquiry in composition, rhetoric, and technical communication studies research. Interrogating the WPA-L's status as a public presentation for disciplinary lore is another valuable venue for research—the WPA-L is *used* by its community, and how to best make use of this massive text is a question worth exploring. Case studies could begin to describe the role of WPA-L and other social media in the formation of graduate students' ideas about technological use and identities, or in professionalization and pedagogical or administrative decision-making more broadly, while studies of the LISTSERV's rhetoric and process of deliberation offers an opportunity to describe how both knowledge and policy in academia are created. If disciplinary mailing lists are valuable, what's the best way to make use of them?

Finally, this dissertation offers a starting place to examine rhetorics of technology as they develop on other similar disciplinary sites, both those clearly thematically connected to technology (like TechRhet or the Society of Technical Communicators LISTSERVs) or those focused on other topics (WCenter). Going beyond the WPA-L to analyze claims, *doxa*, and rhetorical strategies in these sites would provide interesting points of comparison and likely offer counter-narratives to the one created in this analysis. Other everyday texts that provide

ready grounds for rhetorical analysis are policy and position statements from NCTE and CCCC or annotated bibliographies in sources like *Research in Teaching English*, which are increasingly including technology and digital literacies. CCCCs programs and proposals are other sites where researchers can get a sense for how composition has historically treated technology. Such a narrative would provide important perspectives as we move into a world where computers become larger parts of instruction. Our practice and our discourse need to continually be interrogated—a larger, more comprehensive analysis, would provide a compelling account of how we compose technology. If, as I point out in Chapter 1, composition has historically moved forward by constructing and reacting against powerful orthodoxies within the discipline, then rhetorical critiques of this kind become ways to help push composition out of the stagnation so many scholars have declaimed. Even if this is not the case, the WPA-L—often discussed, but rarely examined—is a specific, local site to study not only the discipline as it wrestles with digital writing, but also online and digital writing itself.

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APPENDIX

Table A.1 WPA-L Threads

PD#	*Subject line*	*Participants in thread*	*Messages in thread*	*Doxa coded*	*Threads begin with*
P 01	Citation questions about e-readers	12	19	11	Query
P 02	Blogs, wikis, and FERPA	16	22	5	Query
P 03	Is anyone else using Xtranormal to teach argumentation?	6	10	3	Query about use of a particular tool
P 05	Congrats to Linda Bergmann and Purdue	33	33	4	Shared link or resource
P 06	Intersecting digital literacies, WPA, and class	3	9	11	Query
P 07	Wikipedia on FYC	29	45	13	Query with claim
P 08	How I Wish Technology Could Help Me Provide Feedback	6	6	8	Query
P 09	to blog or not to blog	15	16	13	Query about use of a particular tool
P 10	Machine Scoring	11	21	20	Shared link or resource with claim
P 11	Alternatives to MSWord	3	5	4	Query about use of a particular tool

Table A.1 Continued

PD#	*Subject line*	*Participants in thread*	*Messages in thread*	*Doxa coded*	*Threads begin with*
P 12	Podcasts and writing instruction?	7	8	2	Query about use of a particular tool
P 13	Question re: modern film camera work	7	22	21	Query with claim
P 14	Brain rot (was Question re: modern camera film work)	11	25	12	Change of subject line
P 15	Powerpoint projection access at CCCC	6	6	2	Query
P 16	Korean student writing with Smart Phone produces idiomatic English	14	17	34	Query
P 17	Update on Korean student with translation app	5	5	2	Followup from previous thread
P 18	Surveillance Creep	7	14	17	Query
P 19	Happy Birthday WPA-L	35	37	4	Announcement
P 20	4Cs mentioned on prominent digital game site	7	10	6	Shared link or resource
P 22	Texting is Writing	5	5	4	Shared link or resource
P 23	Recs for Invited Speakers about Technologies and Writing?	4	5	4	Query

Table A.1 Continued

PD#	*Subject line*	*Participants in thread*	*Messages in thread*	*Doxa coded*	*Threads begin with*
P 24	A passing thought on the WPA-L's' fixation on plagiarism	9	14	3	Change of subject line
P 25	citation of Writing Spaces	10	17	4	Query
P 26	Lebduska's "The Facebook Mirror"/Inside Higher Ed	25	49	26	Shared link or resource
P 27	New online WPA resource: WPA's Guide to the Hybrid Writing Classroom	12	18	5	Shared link or resource
P 28	The Ideal Writing Environment	22	53	56	Query
P 29	Writing = Technology	2	2	1	Change of subject line
P 30	Writing horseshoe-of-horse-heading-east Technology	9	32	38	Change of subject line
P 31	Everything is a remix	10	20	4	Shared link or resource
P 32	Step Away From the Phone and Talk to the People You Are With	5	6	7	Shared link or resource with claim
P 33	Online versus face-to-face courses	12	25	20	Query

Table A.1 Continued

PD#	*Subject line*	*Participants in thread*	*Messages in thread*	*Doxa coded*	*Threads begin with*
P 34	Private/public and Workplace Writing: Facebook Posting-related Firings	15	19	8	Shared link or resource with claim
P 35	Is Plagiarism the New Comma Splice?	9	17	2	Query
P 36	request	12	14	0	Query
P 37	Question about MyCompLab	14	26	15	Query with claim
P 38	The research paper encourages realtivism	5	6	5	Shared link or resource with claim
P 39	question about rights	3	6	4	Query
P 40	Some different questions about MLA interviews	5	6	1	Query
P 41	Welcome to Pine Point interactive documentary	7	7	2	Shared link or resource
P 42	smart pens?	7	7	4	Query about use of a particular tool
P 43	question about Accuplacer cutoff scores	7	7	5	Query
P 45	Do Public Universities REQUIRE Laptops?	5	5	7	Query

Table A.1 Continued

PD#	*Subject line*	*Participants in thread*	*Messages in thread*	*Doxa coded*	*Threads begin with*
P 46	request for recommendations	5	6	2	Query
P 47	National Center for Academic Transformation	5	6	3	Query
P 48	Accuplacer	6	8	5	Query
P 49	National Day on Writing	12	14	0	Query
P 50	"Textbook" about Blogging	4	7	0	Query
P 51	video lectures and distance ed in FYC	6	6	0	Query about use of a particular tool
P 52	Teaching Digital Composition To Students With Varying Digital Literacies	6	9	16	Query
P 54	Writing about (digital) writing?	5	5	6	Query
P 55	Documents to Go	11	15	11	Query about use of a particular tool
P 56	Online course evals	6	7	1	Query
P 57	Digital rhetoric, composition studies, and communication studies	7	8	5	Query

Table A.1 Continued

PD#	*Subject line*	*Participants in thread*	*Messages in thread*	*Doxa coded*	*Threads begin with*
P 58	FB Groups for Class	11	13	7	Query about use of a particular tool
P 59	Visual Rhetoric	4	8	1	Query with claim